

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



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BLACK SHEEP'S GOLD

BEATRICE
GRIMSHAW

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SANDS OF ORO
EYES IN THE CORNER
WRECK OF THE REDWING
PARADISE POACHERS
ETC., ETC.

BLACK SHEEP'S GOLD

By
BEATRICE
GRIMSHAW



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BLACK SHEEP'S GOLD

CHAPTER I

WILD SEAHORSES

THE cigar was unwontedly good; it had made me peaceful and dreamy—that, or the reaction after the fuss of getting aboard and away. At all events, I leaned in the cushioned smoke-room chair, and gave myself up to enjoyment; let the sounds and sights and the smells of the great liner flow pleasantly over me. A girl was singing a little, exquisite French song with a merry ripple in the notes; through panels of plate glass that gave on the music-room, one could see the sparkle of gilding, gloss of satins and brocades; in the smoke-room, where I sat, there was smell of tobacco and pleasant drinks, murmur of well-bred voices, slap and rustle of cards, calls for the “boy”. . . . Up the companion, rising like an incense to the gods of modern shipping, came that immemorial, mixed ship-smell that travellers know; chilled fruit in it, rubber carpeting in it, paint, soap, upholstery; last, not least to me, suggestion of good meals.

They were all there, the things that I had known and forgotten. And the beat, beat of the great steamer heart, that was to carry on, day an night, until Hong-Kong; and the barely-heard, long wash of the

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Coral Sea, as we ran north from Cairns in Queensland up towards Torres Straits, through all the sapphire and topaz glory of a tropic winter day. . . .

Who is able to write the eclogue of those tropic winters, along Australia's and New Guinea's opposite coasts—the air like golden wine just breathed on by a hint of distant cold; the seas blue blue beyond any epithet or comparison discoverable in books—light that makes all the lights of colder latitudes seem penny-farthing candles; light striking from above and below, and slaying all shadow with its crystal sword; so that a man dressed in white seems to walk in it almost invisible. . . . Days, in midwinter of July and June, that hold a secret intoxicant, nameless, incredible to all who have not tasted it; something that keeps in its depths the very spring of life, hints at the existence of delights just over the edge of our poor five senses, some day, perhaps, to be explored by a wiser race. . . . Love of the sun, craving for tropic glories, are not ignorable, not vain. Did not the race of man take birth in the sunlands? Those who come after us will formulate that debt, collect it. We of to-day scarce know its existence; but we look, we finger, we hanker—and are reproved by the too-wise. For it remains a truth, that worldly prosperity haunts the lands of winter dark.

. . . It cannot have been the cigar, that sent all this skimming and balancing through my mind, as the last of the gulls of Cairns were skimming and balancing about the ship. Or yet the one good whisky I had had. I think it was the much stronger stimulant of one hundred and seventy two solid pounds, mine since yesterday, and now in the care of the ship's majestic purser. There's nothing makes a man feel

so innocently drunk, as a hatfull of cash, when he has been a long time short. This cash of mine was the result of a lucky win in a sweep on the English Derby; nothing more respectable than that—but the strictest purist could hardly have found fault with my way of spending it. I was down in Cairns upon business (very small business and cheap) when the windfall came; and wisely, I decided to go home at once, instead of waiting for the monthly B.P. boat. For, after all, I wasn't out of my twenties and Cairns is rather unnecessarily full of bars, also of little sly shops that are not what they pretend, or ought to be; and money flies; and I didn't want mine to fly. One treat I must have, I decided; and the call of the *Catacara* suggested its kind. I would spend eight of my precious pounds on a two-day run to Thursday Island, and get back thence to New Guinea by cutter. For two days, I would dream that I was back in the spacious days of Home and riches; the years when my father owned a fine country house, and a smallish town house, and I had been going to be an English squire, some time or other, and life and society and the "right people", and what one was going to do with oneself after Harrow and the 'Varsity, had all been changeless, solid as fixed stars.

Nothing solidier than that house, the long avenue with the firs and the crackling gravel, the cottages and farms that were ours, the garden and its strange old-fashioned roses—rice roses, Scotch yellow, moss roses, cabbage, "Glory-John",—and its flowering currant that clambered over the palings, and made pungent scent in spring-time, scent strong to carry through ten thousand miles and twenty years. Nothing more sure than the passing for ever and ever the

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same, of those slow summers and winters, in the North of England climate; pale suns and pretty, passionless flowers, rain and short days and snow. Everything set, unalterable. . . .

In one half hour, it was swept away. My father fell dead of unsuspected heart trouble. The solid house, the firs and the avenue, the cottages and farms, Harrow, Cambridge, the "right people", the set, unalterable way of living, all went down the winds of the world together, swept by the same great hurricane. He had speculated. . . . He had hoped to set things right. . . . Anyone can fill in the rest.

That was in '14. You know what followed. I was eighteen years of age, hearty and husky of build. There was only one thing to do; I did it. In '19, demobilised, aged twenty-three, I faced the world, with some scars and medals to my credit; also two crosses. Nothing much more.

I had been in Egypt; Mesopotamia. The sun lands had got me. I took up land in Australia; failed; went north and north; landed at last in Papua. I had a trading store at the wild west end of the country. I was some years older, a little wiser, a little tougher than even the war had left me. The wild lands had marked me for their own.

And, on that jewelled day of equatorial winter, I was on board the Eastern Liner *Catacara*, having my treat; with no thought of anything but a couple of days' enjoyment, under circumstances that had been mine, and were not; with no dream of anything fateful, anything significant, in the brief journey. I was merely going back to Daru by "T.I." So I thought. What I did not know —you remember; *you* did not

know—was that I was, on that day, running right into the double fate that was to change my life.

It began in the oddest manner conceivable. I had finished my cigar, looked at myself in the long mirror as I strolled out on deck, and decided that I should do—the new Assam suit didn't look very ready-made; the tie and shoes were right, and the head above the tie—dark and smooth, with grey eyes rather too prominent, and staring, a beaky young nose, and a mouth that knew how to shut up—was at least, not unpresentable. I was in a peaceful mood; I liked to be where I was, and liked the look of the people about me, and (if no one is shocked) I thought there was going to be a good lunch by and by, and a good dinner afterward. So that was that; and I found a chair, and dropped into it, wishing I knew how to purr like a cat; for I felt that way.

I was simply lifted out of the chair, before I had time to settle down, by shrieks proceeding from forward, where there was a wide unoccupied space of deck. Girls' shrieks—at least three were in it; and they were screaming at the top of their voices. Feet were stamping on the deck, too; if anything was wrong, it seemed that rescuers were about. Of course I crammed down my hat on my head, as a man who has once hunted will instinctively do in emergency, and made for the space of foredeck, extremely ready to come to the aid of beauty in distress. I don't know what I expected; certainly it was not what I saw.

That morning there had been a fixture posted up beside the saloon companionway—a gymkhana item left over from the last sports meeting. "Seahorse Race" was its name; it did not convey very much to me, but I judged it to be difficult, or unpopular, since

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there were but three entrants; double, each of them—the name of a man, and a girl. I remembered that; I remembered, too, the look in the faces of three or four girls, who were reading the entries, and—one really cannot call it anything else—sniffing over them. They were singularly nice well-bred looking flappers, too; one would not have suspected them of a sniff. These girls I recognised almost as soon as I came out on the foredeck; they were bunched together at one side, looking very hard at the other side, and the “sniff”—it was not quite a sneer—was more prominent than ever.

This, as I have said, I noticed almost at once. What first drew my attention was the sight of three ship's officers, attired in all their tropic glory of white drill and gold, cantering down the deck like horses. On the shoulders of each sat astride an extremely pretty girl, dressed in a bathing suit of the kind known as “one-piece”. I think the bathing suits were silk or satin, or something of that kind; maybe chiffon is the name—at all events, they were very smart, and very bright in colour. The girls had jockey caps on their heads, and they were flogging their mounts along with silk handkerchiefs, and screaming encouragement at the top of their rather high voices.

I saw all this in a moment; recognised it for the “Seahorse Race”, and guessed, without much difficulty, that the riders were three musical comedy actresses, going up to join a revue company touring the East, of whom I had heard when taking my passage. One of them—a tall, white-limbed lass with red bobbed hair—was apparently winning; her mount, the chief officer, was yards ahead of the rest. I saw that. I saw too, the face of a girl on the opposite side of the

deck; staring hard at the racers; she had a profile like an old Italian coin, dark hair close shingled, and exceedingly blue eyes. That face held me for an instant; it was as if the owner had suddenly called. . . .

Then I saw what made me leap across the deck, tear off my jacket, and fling myself over the rail of the *Catacara*, down thirty feet into the sea.

In the excitement of winning, the red-haired girl had let go her hold of the chief officer's forehead, waved her arms, and lost balance completely. They were near the rail; she began to topple, and I saw she was bound to go. I didn't wait for her to fall; I sprang first. I think we went through the air almost together; she struck the water about as soon as I, and we both went down, in a smother of foam and boiling blue.

"The screws!" was my thought, as I rose; and with that came a consoling recollection of the *Catacara's* age; she was no new boat; she hadn't even twin screws. That, I think, saved us. We came up well in the rear; when I had grabbed the girl, and got the water and my own hair out of my eyes, I could see the steamer's immensely tall stern already hundreds of yards away, and leaving us as if nobody had seen us go overboard.

Of course they had; they were getting a boat out, and taking the way off the ship, as quickly as might be—but if ever you have been left in the midst of the inhospitable ocean by a liner running at full speed, you will realise that I had plenty of time to grasp the situation; plenty of time, too, to wonder if we weren't both likely to be drowned before help could reach us. Because the red-haired girl, in spite of her stage bathing costume, couldn't swim at all.

She was plucky; no one could have been pluckier. She gasped a good bit, but did not cling; she did as I

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told her, put her hands on my shoulders, and let her legs swing out to support her. "I—I can float—a bit," she said, chokingly. "I—I'm not a scrap afraid. Never say die; th—that's my motto."

If she was not afraid, I was; abominably so. Because I had seen something she, with her face turned towards my back, had not seen; something I did not want her to see. A black, sharp finger, the finger of death, and ugly death, that beckoned to us both.

I didn't need to look at the *Catacara*—now motionless, a long way off—to know that the boat she had lowered stood no chance in that life-and-death race. I knew what a shark could do in the way of speed, when once it scented food. This shark was only cruising—so I thought—but if it made up its mind to attack us, twenty seconds would see the finish.

And the girl would talk; would try to show me that she wasn't frightened, would emit small giggles, piteously brave. "I bet the cats won't be sorry, if we croak," she said. "See them look at my friend and me? Been down on us all the voyage, they have. This'll be raspberry jam to them. I—is that boat getting any nearer?"

"Almost up," I lied. Something else was almost up. The shark was getting curious; zig-zagging about; coming nearer with every tack. "Look here," I said suddenly. "Are you game to do just what I tell you and ask no questions?"

"Aren't I? Try me."

"Then put your mouth down to the water, and blow as hard as you can."

She stared; was about to speak—but something in my face (I think) checked her. Awkwardly she bent her lips to the swaying green that barely held us up;

strugglingly but determinedly blew. I blew also. Bubbles went streaming from our lips under water; a string of silver bells, a web of pearls. . . . I blew, and watched unceasingly that black curved finger. One would have sworn that it had moved no nearer; yet somehow it was larger; more like the sail of a model yacht than a finger, now. I twisted round as much as I dared, and looked at the ship's boat. Gosh, but they were rowing! Would they be in time?

"Blow," I said savagely to the girl. "Blow more, or I'll drop you." I put my mouth down again, and blew till I almost choked. Years ago, in mid-Pacific, I had heard about this way of keeping off sharks; had even seen the girls who swam in the Prussian-blue pools of Niué, blowing bubbles every now and then, just as a measure of precaution. . . .

But was there really anything in it? Had any human creature, attacked or in danger of attack, ever kept away these tigers of the deep by merely puffing bubbles at them? I didn't know. I only knew that there was nothing else to do.

I twisted round again, and now the fin was certainly bigger—but the shark was leisurely in his movements, still. He zig-zagged up and down like a boat beating against the breeze. I found it hard to estimate his distance; I only knew that every one of those long beats brought him a little nearer to the bright-coloured moving mass he must long since have perceived—ourselves.

It was impossible to go on blowing for ever. We halted, for a rest. By this time the girl had certainly guessed what was happening; but she said never a word. Her laughter, her silly bravado, had vanished; she held to my shoulder with a clutch of iron, and her

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breath came short as sobs, but she still kept her head; still refrained from grabbing or hampering me.

She didn't even ask questions. The sun beat terribly upon our heads; we floated unstably, almost overturning; our mouths were full of salt, and our hearts of deadly fear. I looked at the fin again. "God," I said, and didn't know I spoke, "its coming," for it had turned end on and I saw it as a black spike sticking out of the water, incredibly huge.

I put my mouth down again, and blew—blew till my lungs were one hot pain all down my back. The black fin poised. I felt the girl's finger nails like claws in my neck; heard her spluttering uselessly into the water, game to the last; swung her round, I don't know how, so as to get my body between her and the sea-tiger that was hungering for our blood; saw it go off with a rush like a torpedo, and thought the end was come.

What I had forgotten about was the boat.

I don't think for a moment that our blowings and bubblings had any effect upon the shark, other than to excite its curiosity. It was the near approach of the ship's whaleboat, furiously rowed, that gave it pause. Pause, I say, because, when the boat had dashed between us and the shark, and four strong arms were busy hauling us up over the gunwale—a thing that can't be done in seconds, try how you may—the shark suddenly seemed to realise that its dinner was leaving it, and made such a determined charge that the sailors had to fight it off with all the available oars. I don't think that would have stopped it either, had not somebody had the forethought to bring an axe. With this, the chief officer hit the brute fair on the head, and sent it fathoms deep, spouting out more red blood

through the blue of the water than anyone could believe who has not seen a shark killed.

They had got us into the boat by this time, and the chief had a tot of whisky ready. I never saw a man look more as if he wanted one himself, but that was small wonder; if he had not been playing the giddy goat, nothing would have happened. I think I told him as much; also, that I was not in the least cold, and would have a dry shift in ten minutes; didn't need a drink. The lady, I said, had better have one.

She and he shared it. Her face looked very white, under her wet red hair, and I daresay he may have thought she would take cold; anyhow, he put his uniform coat round her, and was making all fast with his arm when she wriggled apart from him, and flung herself down on the seat beside me.

"I'm going to sit next the bravest man I ever met," she said, her breast heaving up and down very fast under the white and gold coat. I saw she was almost in hysterics, so I simply answered, "Rats. We fell over together." And nobody said anything more, till the whaleboat nosed against the ship's side.

When they got us on board, it was the very devil for five minutes. People came and shook my hand, and told me I was a brave man; some of them thumped my back; several wanted me to come and have a drink.

I answered plain truth, told them that there was nothing to make a fuss about; we fell together, and it was much worse for her than for anyone, since she couldn't swim; if they wanted to make songs about anyone, it might as well be the lady.

"Oh, we all know Gin-Sling is game," said somebody, "but you're gamer." "We couldn't have done without Jinny," cut in someone else. "No, by Jove!"

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—"Jinny for ever!"—"Gin-Sling's preserver!"
"Hooray!"

They would have it; I was fairly mobbed. I could hardly get to my cabin for a change of clothes without being carried on the shoulders of the crowd. But that I was determined against; I slipped down a steward's companion, and got away.

The peace of my cabin, its cool glittering white walls and shining brasses, the silk coverlet and curtains, the subdued purring, outside, of the formidable sea, now so safely mastered and shut away, came on me like a blessing. I dropped on the lounge; it was some time before I ever thought of dragging off my sodden shoes, and shedding my wet clothing. I had not touched the chief officer's flask, or accepted the champagne that others had been anxious to uncork for me, but I was drunk, mind and body, on one look that I had caught as I came slowly, drenched with weariness and wet, up the ship's ladder. A look from blue eyes below black shingled hair. A look that cast a girl's fair soul at my feet.

The Breaking of the Dream

CHAPTER II

THE BREAKING OF THE DREAM

I AWOKE next morning with a name upon my lips; a name I had heard the night before. "Pia Laurier." It seemed to me—as it does still—the sweetest, daintiest girl's name in the world. I knew all about it, too, how Miss Pia Laurier, of the blue eyes and black shingle, had had an Italian grandmother; how the grandmother had bequeathed her a profile and a pretty fortune and a prettier name; how, in consequence, Miss Pia was of more importance in her family—one of the New South Wales squatter families—than elder brothers and sisters; how much her parents thought of her, and how very, very carefully they had brought her up. Miss. Pia jazzed like the best of them; powdered her tiny classic nose and painted her beautiful lips (which, I was certain, needed no colour but their own); whisked about the decks in a skirt that gave you glimpses of silken knees; smoked a cigarette now and then, and drank an occasional cocktail. But she did all these things with reserve. They were not Pia Laurier. They amounted, in sum, to a sort of protective mimicry, not uncommon among original and charming girls who feel, instinctively, that it is not well for a young maiden on her preference

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to be too "different". Pia, in thus making herself like her hard-shelled, predatory compeers, was sheltered by a toughness never hers; advertised (for girls-to-marry need publicity) by

. . . "A borrowed force,
And a hardihood not her own."

Nevertheless she was—one felt it in one's bones—a very re-incarnation of that gracious, titled dame from historic Verona, who had set her mark upon the Lauriers fifty years ago. Pia, like her, would be a house-mistress; she would be a mother; she would be, above and beyond all, the supreme, rare love, pure as spring-water, and passionate as a red Verona rose from the balcony of Verona's deathless girl. . . .

It didn't come as a shock—quite the contrary, because I am twentieth century, almost all—to remember that this modern Juliet could round-up cattle with the best of her brothers, and owned a diamond bracelet won on the public racecourse of Randwick. It made me all the more in love with her. Because, of course, I was in love—perhaps before, but certainly after, that minute when I met her eyes as I came up the gangway, and knew that my foolish feat had won me Pia's heart.

I suppose one is a little mad, when one is asleep, to judge by the general craziness of dreams (you need not quote Freud at me; I take a plain man's privilege of smacking him in the face). I suppose, therefore, that one is half a little mad, when half awake. With full waking, fairy castles fade, and rainbows shred away. It was the arrival of early morning coffee that spoiled half-waking dreams, for me. Once I had drunk

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it, the clear cold light of reason seemed to mingle, in that cabin, with the red of growing day; to tell me that I had better get up and bath and dress, and remember, of all things, that I was leaving the ship to-morrow.

"When you are about it," added that chill monitor, "you might as well recollect that you haven't two hundred pounds in the world, no people, now, who matter; no position, and no prospects. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

I did, with the result that, dressed, I hurried off at once to find the good-natured ship's gossip who, last night, had told me all but all about everyone and everything on board. She had not had quite time to tell me everything—not for want of will, or slackness of tongue—but for the reason that Pia Laurier in a frock like a rose-carnation, passed, unattended, just as the gossip was getting to the point of an interesting tale, and I had incontinently arisen, and fled after the carnation frock and its wearer.

I had managed an introduction (no easy ship-made friendships for the daughter of the Lauriers!) and enjoyed just about five glorious minutes of Pia's company, before the doctor, curse him, came along apologising and grinning and reminding Pia that it was concert night, and that she was down for Number Two. So, just as we were getting past the inevitable stage of "Beautiful voyage", and "Charming ship", and "Are you going far?" into "You like that, too? How strange?"—"Why, that's my favourite also!"—"You really feel as if you had known me somewhere a long time ago?" and the inevitable reference to the days when one of us was a king (or queen) in Babylon, and the other a more or less Christian slave

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—just then, we had to break off and hurry into the staring, glittering music saloon, in company with everybody else.

There had been no more talk with Pia Laurier that night; for the concert lasted the usual hanged long time, and when it was over, Pia's relations, somehow, seemed to be everywhere, monopolising her—maybe by accident, maybe not. And I should have gone very hungry to bed, had it not been for the crust I took with me. That crust was Pia's song. I knew she had been down for a fashionable, new song; it was on the programme, but she did not sing it. She sang, instead, part of Liza Lehmann's exquisite bird-song cycle; sending me to my cabin with the sound in my ears of my lady's lovely little soprano telling the tale of the wood-dove and his mate who had nothing at all on which to start a home, but joyously, they put a few sticks together, and sang—"It'll do—it'll do!"

I suppose I was vain. I suppose all men of a certain youth and vitality are. At any rate, I thought that Pia meant the song for me.

So, next morning, I was agog to get hold of Mrs. Kipple, the good-natured newsmonger, and learn from her anything that might help me in making way with Pia. For I recognised, now, that the stars in their courses were fighting against me. I had only one day, a night, and half a day now left; if I was, in that brief time, to forge a chain that should in some measure link our lives. I needed every possible advantage I could make or steal. By Wednesday noon, the play would be over; the male Cinderella would have lost his pumpkin coach and gone home to sit in the ashes again; and there would be no fairy godmother to find him a second chance.

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I remember Mrs. Kipple, though it's a good time since. I can recall her kindly, skinny face, and her stained veined hands, that knitted without pause all the time she talked. It made me think of a crab ceaselessly twiddling its feelers; and I wondered, absurdly, if the crab could talk while it did it. . . .

Certainly Mrs. Kipple could talk. She did not confine herself to Laurier biography this morning; she stooped to a lower range, and gave me also biography (gingered up till one might almost call it biology) of the actress troupe that had fairly dynamited the peace of the ship.

"My dear boy," she said, knitting till you could hardly see needles or fingers, "everybody thinks you did the bravest—No, I won't if you don't want me to. But it *was*. And not a man on the ship knows whether to present you with a medal, or tar and feather you—figuratively speaking, my dear boy, of course; figuratively. We all have the highest opinion. . . . But you see, Miss Gin-Sling—I think her proper name—if there's anything proper in the question, which is doubtful—I mean, her name on the bills is Genevieve Treacher—well, Gin-Sling, or Jinny, or Genevieve, and her two friends, have simply captured all the eligible men; and what, I ask you, what does a respectable parent bring her daughters away from the Sydney winter and up to China for, unless—you know? Do you remember that too charming joke in an old *Punch*, about the child looking at a picture of the arena in Rome, and telling its mother that there was 'one poor lion that hadn't got a Christian'? My dear boy, there are quite a lot of those poor lions, or lionesses, on the ship, ever since Brisbane, when these—ladies—

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got on. They haven't had a look-in with them. The ship's officers, who are simply meant to flirt with, and the rich planters who ought to marry, and the smart civil service folk—not a chance! Jinny Treacher and her girls have the lot. How can any of the Laurier crowd compete against Seahorse Races? And they don't stop at seahorse racing; I could tell you a tale—" She proceeded to tell it; I can only say that the biology came in at that point, and made me feel rather fidgety. One can't order a woman to hold her tongue, even when you think she's drawing the long bow about other women, and saying things that ought to be left to male scandalmongers, who are always the worst.

"Why do they want to tar and feather me?" I broke in, in order to stop her.

"My dear young man, because Jinny Treacher's sure to fall in love with you! You saved her life!"

I may have blushed at this; I can't pretend that it was altogether disagreeable. As a matter of fact, I thought Miss Treacher—apart from female jealousies—an extremely attractive young person; and even if I had not thought so, it was something to score without even trying in a game that was being so wholeheartedly played by every man on the ship.

But Genevieve, or Gin-Sling, whatever one chose to call her—was not business. I wanted to hear about someone else.

"Are the Lauriers going far?" I asked.

"China and Japan; getting away from the Sydney cold weather. They go somewhere every winter, and always take a daughter with them. It's Pia' turn this time. They married off a daughter

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last year and I daresay they'll get rid of Pia this time."

Get rid of Pia!

"Is she engaged?" I asked, looking the kindly gossip fair in the face.

"Pia? I suppose more or less; a girl of her sort has always someone on a string. There was some talk of Sir Richard Fanshawe, the flying-man, but I imagine the mother was against it."

"Why?" I asked shamelessly. It would be well to know just what the plump pigeony little woman, with a cooing voice and a hard watchful face, whom I had marked as Pia's mother, demanded for her girl.

"Not enough title. He's fairly rich—promoted a few successful companies in New Guinea, and so on—but he is only a war knight, without much family behind him. Pia ought to be at least a countess. Look at what that skinny ugly little school friend of hers, Sue Carpenter, picked up—Lord Chatteris, no less! I don't know if she's attached to the Fanshawe man, but I daresay she could detach herself, if something better—You know, a girl like that simply must marry into the very best set; she would be a fish out of water anywhere else."

I did not know whether any personal reference was wrapped up in all this packaging of chatter, or not. With Mrs. Kipple, one could never tell. She was, like many gossips, not such a fool as she looked. I chose to think that she had been merely talking at large, and sat silent for a minute. It was a wonderful day of spangling glassy sun; the crests of the little waves spat fire; in the light-blue sky, the light-blue running sea, lurked, half peering out, half hid, the exulting, malicious spirit that haunts these solitary

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places. "It's my God," I thought, "and I worship it; nothing will ever change that." . . .

"There's the second bell," said Mrs. Kipple, and got up. "If you don't hurry," she added, warningly, "you don't get the best of the fruit." But I did not hurry. I didn't care if I never saw fruit again. Pia Laurier and her mother were coming up the promenade deck.

I thought the elder lady looked at me coldly. She was not a scrap like Pia, save in those small resemblances of carriage, shape of head and poise of limbs, that run through families. She had fair, sleeked hair, and eyes like sharp pins; she was dressed, shod, corseted with terrifying perfection, and about her clung like an aura that "power of the woman of fashion to daunt and repel", that seems to have crushed the gentle spirit of Emerson, in his time; that, with eighty further years of civilisation, has certainly grown no less. Jinny Treacher had called me "the bravest man in the world"; but, under that look of Mrs. Laurier's, I felt my courage crumble, and my heart turn to water.

Deny it how you may, there is, in the scorn of a fashionable woman—a creature who has given herself up for life, to the "mean admiration of mean things", the chase of stinking game-power both to humiliate and hurt. Small, burning spots of memory like scars made by drops of acid, mark such wounds, for many kindly, ordinary folk. The woman of hard-won position may be a snob, but never can be weak; she has sold her soul, and collected the price, and the price is what the devil has offered, from time immemorial—power. She uses it; she sends it like a Matthew's death-ray straight at the "outsider" whom she wishes

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to destroy, and no armour of self-respect, of conscious value in the things that are not mean, avails against it. It pierces.

Mrs. Laurier pierced me. But a man may fight when wounded. I answered her look by getting up from my seat, and making a step forward. What I meant was to join the morning walk of herself and her daughter. I knew Pia now; I had a right to speak. . . . And, gods of youth and beauty, but she was ensnaring, that pale-blue merry morning on the sea! The shape of her little black head; the milk-pale profile set against the blue; the eye that, sidewise, shot its message out to me, while her face looked demurely forward—the beautiful arms and legs of her, showing out of her slim pink dress——

She was dragging her step; holding, a little, back. I would have been beside her in another moment—

“Good morning, Mr. Amory! Is it possible you don’t know me, after saving me from a watery and fishy death no more than yesterday afternoon!”

It was “Gin-Sling”. She had gone to her cabin, exhausted, after we reached the ship, and no one had seen her again that evening. Now she appeared, bright as a peony at a show, with her wonderful red hair teased out into a kind of halo, her thin body cased in some painted, vivid rag; eyes and teeth sparkling, glass bracelets clinking, an anklet and a bell on it jingling, feet—dancer’s feet they were, small, but too muscular and spread—pointing and springing, as if they moved to invisible music. I think, so did Jinny Treacher through her life; she danced, marched, moved, to music of her own; ruled her days—so far as they were ruled—by laws not made of man. I have

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my reasons for handling her tenderly; I know what you do not, yet, of Jinny.

Naturally, I had to answer her. And naturally, too, the mother and daughter moved on, and I was left alone with Jinny Treacher.

She did not sit down. She put both feet together, and jumped into the air, two or three times, with incredible vivacity. "That's how I feel," she said. "I always feel like that when the sun shines. Can't live in the dark. Spoiling me Career, it is. They'd eat me up in London—I've bin offered shop after shop—but I was born in Sydney, where it's daylight when it is daylight, and I've got the sun in me bones—I couldn't stick it anywhere they light the lamps at three. Singapore's where we're bound for; I and my friends. 'The Chinese Butterfly', company number three. One of their girls has married and one died, and another wants to leave. So little me and mine come in, because the managing director of the company's a friend of ours."

I was not interested; I was raging over the loss of my chance of speaking with Pia—but you never knew Gin-Sling, if you think one could stand beside her, see her look into your eyes, and remain indifferent. She went to the head of any man, as swiftly as the drink after which she had, most appropriately, been named. She went to mine. But I didn't care. I knew I should be sober again. There was that in the blue eyes of Pia to sober me after a dozen of Jinny's cocktails.

And, by God, it came into my mind there and then—I who had never wanted to marry before—that this was what true marriage might mean. Something that could hold a man in spite of himself, in

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spite of a world of Jinny Treachers. Certainty. Rest.

Gin-Sling, however, had no mind to be neglected. "Take me for a walk," she said, half shutting her eyes and shooting fire at me from under heavily-blackened lashes. She had beautiful sensuous eyelids, round and deep as white shells; they flickered constantly as she looked at you. She was one flicker from head to foot; a human flame. . . .

I marched with her round the decks, and if anything could have made me forget Pia and her mother down below, that progress would have done it. It was like walking with royalty, to walk with Genevieve Treacher. Men shot looks of black envy, women glanced jealously aside. I could believe what Mrs. Kipple had told me, about the "Christianless lions", now. The look in those girls' faces said plainly—"So she has taken you, too!" And I realised, what perhaps I had not understood before, that yesterday's incident had made me something of a celebrity; something worth the throw of a handkerchief. . . . We strolled and talked, I don't know what about. I didn't realise how long we had been walking, till I saw Mrs. Laurier come up from breakfast again. If she had looked at me chillingly before, her eyes were freezing now. She swept Jinny Treacher with a glance that should have turned the girl to a pillar of ice. I think Jinny felt it; but in sheer bravado, she turned her head, stopped almost in Mrs. Laurier's path, and remarked, defiantly: "Well, here I am; what do you think of me?"

The main companion doorway was just beside me. Like a coward, I slipped through it, and fled. I don't know to this day what happened; I only know that

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as I hurried down the staircase, I saw Mrs. Laurire passing on, undisturbed.

A glimpse of Jinny's face came to me through a skylight. She seemed as one who had seen a daylight ghost. . . .

"She's got the death-ray now," I thought, "I wonder how she likes it."

I hoped she wasn't hurt; you could not wish ill to her. But it was impossible not to know that my stock, with Mrs. Laurier, had now dropped yet another point below par—through Jinny.

All these things mattered little. What I wanted, what I was prepared to pull the ship in pieces to get, was another talk with Pia. I knew her mother would nose us out before long; still, the dining-saloon, between meals, is a good place for quiet on almost any ship, and I hoped she would be there.

She was, lingering over the last of her breakfast, alone at her table. Almost everyone else had gone; the stewards were setting their own meal at the other end of the saloon. It was a pleasant place, especially to one whose eye had long been starved of everything beyond barest necessities. Blue satin curtains waving from open ports; chairs, panellings, of brocade and bird's-eye maple; pictures let into the walls; a great gay arch overhead, painted in colours and gold, and filled with the shine of crystal and the green and rose of hanging gardens—all these things pleased me; made me catch a sigh, as I descended the broad companion, and remembered that after to-morrow's noon, the ship, the splendour, and the jewel so fittingly enshrined by it all, would be for Phil Amory, vagabond trader, but a fleck on the far horizon of the Coral Sea.

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Pia was cutting open a passion-fruit; the shells of several others lay about her plate. You can take quite a good while over a passion-fruit, if you want to. . . .

I ordered breakfast, and asked if I might join her. She bowed her head a little coolly, and I remembered that one could see passing figures on deck, from the open scuttles above us. You couldn't curse Gin-Sling—if you were a man like others, but if I had been extraordinary enough to dislike Jinny Treacher, I should certainly have cursed her then, in that she had shorn away a few of my inestimable moments; wasted them for me with the necessity of making explanations.

It took a little while. I had to tell Pia that I had been looking for her; thought she never would come up. I had to say that with my eyes about Jinny, which I could not, gallantly, say with my lips. Minutes ran away, and still Pia was playing with that most allegorical and significant passion fruit; still avoiding my eyes. At any moment Mrs. Laurier might swiftly glide down—she was amazingly quick and quiet for a fat small woman—at any minute launch the Death Ray at me again. I was growing desperate, when, in an instant, the whole problem was solved, and the situation crystallized, by a steward.

He had come on board at Cairns, a temporary hand, meant to supply the place of one left in hospital. He was hardly up to his job; plainly bewildered by the multitude of duties, the scores of new faces about him. Me, he had just served with breakfast, and I don't think he realised that Pia had not come in with me. As he planted my bacon and eggs down on the table, he asked me, in a perfectly audible voice, not untinctured

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with reproach "What will there be for your lady, sir?"

I was dumb. Pia answered with perfect self-possession: "Nothing, thanks, I've had breakfast", and let him go in ignorance of the fact that he had just bracketed as husband and wife two people who had first met on the previous day.

I can still see her, as she caught my eyes with her own—and weren't those two blue wells of truth a-sparkle with mischievous merriment! She pursed her lips up, and pretended to be terribly shocked, but it was a gay pretence. Her mother might have thought it correct to faint under the table; and if she had thought it correct, would have undoubtedly done so, in the best possible style, with an entirely correct disposition of ankles. But the neo-Georgian girl does not faint, literally or metaphorically, before the idea of being somebody's wife. We both laughed consumedly, and I went on with my eggs and bacon, and that was all there was of it.

All—except for the splendid fact that the ice had been broken between us. We fairly burst into conversation.

I don't know what we talked about at first. It was like orchard-robbing—when you run from one tree to another, plucking, eating, cramming, hurrying, intent on getting as much as you can in the few minutes before you are found and chased out by the farmer with the cart-whip. You hardly know what you have had, in the end—only that it has been fun. . . .

By and by all the stewards had breakfasted and gone, and somebody was dusting at the far end of the saloon; and bells sounded, of which we took no note. We were too busy orchard-robbing. I remember about

this time, that we began to tell each other the story of our lives. Pia had got to the diamond bracelet, and the day she rode for it and won it on Randwick racecourse; and an interesting incident that had the Prince of Wales in it—when suddenly she checked herself, and said:

"It's all such tosh, isn't it? You live a real life. Tell me some secrets and adventures in New Guinea."

Now, I don't know—or perhaps, I do—what had helped her to read me as she did; but it is a fact that while she was talking, something that was both a secret and an adventure—and a big one of both kinds—had been floating about in my consciousness. I had never spoken of it, never hinted it, to a soul. It was my chief and almost only reason for burying myself on the wild West coast as a trader, beyond call of civilisation; and it might be in the end, the means of setting me free to choose between the wild life and the tame; to choose, indeed, between any and all of the goods of this purchasable world. I had been sitting on the secret with the persistency of a wild-fowl on an egg—and now, in an instant, behold it discovered, given over to the girl whom I had not yet known forty-eight hours.

"There is an adventure," I said, glancing about the emptied, silent saloon. The sun had changed oddly; it was pouring straight down, now, through the flowers of the hanging garden, on to the centre table, though ten minutes ago, or thereabouts, it had seemed to come aslant through the ports. The stewards had ceased clashing and rattling huge masses of silver, in some invisible retreat behind the saloon, and there was a faint clink of cups audible.

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From the deck above came the steady tramping and scuffling of feet, the sound of voices; now and then a shriek of laughter, where Genevieve Treacher, no doubt, was holding merry court.

"I've never told anyone," I went on. Pia nodded, as if to say: "Of course; not till I came." It was amazing, how we talked without words, that morning on the sea. . . .

"I've explored a bit," I went on. "Not much. It takes money. But I know something. There was an expedition starved out, years ago, between two unknown rivers, and just as it had to turn back, they saw something wonderful. It was so wonderful that the leader of the expedition just looked at it, and came away, and never said a word to anyone—his mate died on the way back—but he always meant to go back, as soon as he could get the money to fit out again, because he knew there might be a fortune in it. Well, he never did; he died too——"

"Does everyone die in Papua?" cut in Pia. The faint sea-rose underlying the ivory of her face, was just a little dimmed.

"Well, it isn't exactly a sanatorium outback—but the towns——"

"Never mind about the towns. Tell me the secret. Did your friend who died give it to you?"

"No. He left it to the woman he had been engaged to, only she—she——"

"Died?"

"No. She was dead when he left it to her—I can't help it; you mustn't think everybody dies there any more than they do in other places——"

I was growing breathless, with my desire to explain away the difficulty that haunts all residents of the Dark

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Land, in the presence of listening strangers. It is a fact that our tales are full of death and destruction; it is also a fact that statistics show nothing very alarming in the way of an annual death rate. I don't know how the contradiction can be explained, but I do know that both sets of facts are true.

"She was dead," I went on, "and I couldn't find out anything about her people, and his diary was in my hands, so I simply kept it, partly because I didn't suppose anyone would believe it but myself, and partly because I wasn't going to have anyone else trying. No, he had no relations either——"

"Does nobody——"

"If we have, we don't tell about 'em. They're either too bad, or too good, if you understand me. Well——"

"But the secret—what was it?"

I looked round again before speaking; almost I thought I heard the tramp of feet. But that was not likely—no one came there at that hour of the day. I was going on, when Pai jumped out of her seat as if a bucket of water had been poured over her, and without a word bolted up the wide staircase. Her flying heels disappeared on deck, just at the moment when a stately procession through some unknown ship's alleyway, entered the saloon. The captain, the purser, the doctor, the chief steward, all in white, all sparkling in their several degrees with gold buttons, gold stripes, gold epaulettes, gold capbands. Eleven o'clock inspection, nothing less!

"Gosh!" I murmured, collecting myself, and standing up. The captain paused, gave me a kindly nod, and asked me if I was none the worse for yesterday's adventure; said one or two polite things, and passed

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on. The chief steward eyed me with disapproval; chief stewards, owing to their anomalous position, are always somewhat soured, and I could see that he didn't think passengers were in place, in the dining saloon, between meals. They were all gone in a minute, and I had time to recollect myself, and bless the ready ears of Pia Laurier.

I did not go out on deck; I did not want to. What I wanted was to be alone, and remember every little thing she had said, done, and looked, in that amazing two hours. It was impossible that Pia should have fallen in love with me—impossible, I kept telling myself, fiercely. A girl like that—a girl who had the world at her feet—a girl brought up——

Well, but if she were not in love—a girl brought up like that—what had she been doing? Flirting outrageously, reasonlessly, with a man she didn't know anything about; a man of whom her family certainly disapproved. If she were not in love with me, I was bound to suppose that this sort of thing was her usual habit; that she would dodge away from her people to "carry on" below decks, with anyone and everyone. There was no getting away from it; if I were not especially favoured, then lovely face, pure eyes, never on earth had lied as did the face, the eyes, of Pia Laurier.

After all—after all—that plunge yesterday—the sharks!—I did not want to "shake hands with myself" over an exploit that was nothing at all, compared to the things one had had to do as a matter of routine, day by day, during the not-yet-forgotten great War; still, I could not deny that it might have looked well to a girl who didn't know anything about battlefields. Certainly, Jinny Treacher——

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There was no getting away from "Gin-Sling". I had not been in my cabin ten minutes, when I heard a vivacious sound in the alleyway—odd stamping and scrambling, cries of a strangely mingled kind—"Loo, loo! Sick him, sick him! Hou-p-la—yoicks! Drink hearty, we'll soon be dead—" a phrase, this last, that I had already recognised as Jinny Treacher's favourite war-cry. It had little to do with drink; she was no drunkard—it embodied, I rather fancy, her philosophy of life; broke down into common speech quotations of which she had never heard, and expressed in brief the craving all men feel for joy, snatched hastily upon the heel of dark. . . .

I don't mean to say that I thought all this while Jinny and her crew were battering, as they proceeded at once to batter, upon my bolted door. It was days later, when I had time and time to think, time to burn, time to pile up in useless rotting heaps of hours and minutes, that I formulated the philosophy of Gin-Sling. At the moment, I felt nothing but gratification and dismay; the latter certainly strongest. And if you wonder how one could be gratified and dismayed at the same moment, over a lady's rather intimate call, I can only answer that you did not know Jinny.

Of course I had to open; and then the meaning of certain strange pawing and scratching sounds became plain; also the strangle-hold that Jinny clearly possessed, over the male inhabitants of the ship. A dozen men—mostly youthful and frivolous—were down on their hands and knees on the alley-way carpet, pretending to be hounds. Jinny, with her jockey cap on her head, and a dog-whip in hand, was imitating a huntsman—according to her lights, which

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were, perhaps, not of the brightest. "Sick him, Towser," she cried. "Ss-ss-! Trusty! Pull him out, tear him!" Two youths, howling dismally, tugged me forth and rolled me unresisting on the carpet. I played up, and acted death, wondering all the time what on earth it was about, and wishing myself well out of it. For the truth is that we who leaped from childhood into sudden, hard maturity, under the bellowing teachers of the Ardennes, have little play left in us.

Not immediately was I to be enlightened; the sudden appearance on the scene of Mrs. Kipple prevented that. I cannot pretend to say why that worthy lady turned up at an unwonted hour among the sleeping cabins, on a deck that wasn't hers—though, perhaps, one may be allowed to guess, in view of the fact that Jinny's crew was making noise enough to wake the dead. At all events, she did appear, and Jinny, shouting, caught hold of her.

"In at the death!" she yelled. "You must be blooded." She ran a forefinger across her rouged lips, and smeared Mrs. Kipple's cheek with a fiery cross.

Mrs. Kipple, smiling a smile that had something of the quality of the Laurier death-ray in it, submitted. I think she was fully paid, by the hope of being the first to report another "disgraceful riot" . . .

That woman should have been a Yankee journalist. "Scoops" were her passion.

"Now, may one ask," she said, "why you are ill-treating our hero?"

"Damn," I muttered, head on the carpet. "I can't stick hero."

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Nobody heard me; the youths were pretending to sit up and beg from the huntsman—and Jinny was patting their heads, and calling them good dogs.

"Oh," she answered, to Mrs. Kipple's demand, "that's just it; we don't mean to let a hero skulk, specially when everybody's looking for him to present an address."

I had to beg Mrs. Kipple's pardon immediately, because, in the heat of the moment, I said—exactly what you would have said. It was no use, however; they were determined to have me out, and have me out they did. And a little later, in the music room, the doctor read an address that made me feel one blush from scalp to sole, afterwards presenting me with the beastly thing, to keep. . . .

And after the horrid ceremony, Jinny, in a solemn processional way, marched out before me, blowing imaginary trumpets, until we reached the companion, when she dropped her dignity, called "Houp-la! Get out of the way," and shouldered through a press of passengers.

It was Mrs. Kipple's luck alone that prevented her being smitten in the face by the preposterous heel of Jinny's shoe, as Jinny slid gorgeously down the banisters, right on to the mat before the saloon door.

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. Sky and sea pale blue with a laugh in the heart of it, and a hint of coming dark that shadowed the laugh, even as some subconscious thought of time that flies, beauty that passes, was wont to shadow the sun of Jinny's merriment. Light, golden still, but thick as honey, spilled like honey in long pools about the

decks, sliding and moving as the steamer swayed upon her course. Gulls screaming about the mast-heads, as they scream at break of even—who knows why? In fine, my last day almost done. My voyage over, all but the night and a useless hour or two of early morning; for we were not, after all, to run into Thursday Island; a tender was to meet the ship, and take the passengers off.

What had I done? Where was the link that I had sworn should bridge the space between Pia Laurier's life and mine, somehow, before I left the ship? The answer was—Nothing; nowhere.

Jinny and her crew had never left me alone, from morning until now. The two other girls had been pressed into service; they with Jinny's special posse of youthful admirers, and last, never least, Gin-Sling herself, had combined to keep every moment occupied. Jazzing on the promenade deck; "treasure-hunting" all over the ship, with a lock of red hair as prize (and at the last it turned out, amid screams of laughter, to be a curl cut from a setter dog in charge of the ship's butcher), tea in the captain's cabin—the three girls, the chief officer, the captain, and myself; a special entertainment this, got up to do me honour, which I loathed, but could not avoid—all these things had eaten, minute by minute, hour by hour, into my precious afternoon, until now it was near sunset, and the west towards which we were running, gateway of the Old World's East, was red with the life-blood of the last day Pia and I might ever know, together.

There wasn't a man on the ship who did not envy me, I think, for Jinny made me her partner in every game, and if I did not kiss her a dozen times or more,

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behind funnels, deckhouses, inside alleyways and down companions, it was not because she did not give me fair chance of doing so. I suppose I was freely credited with what I did not take. At any rate, I caught the stinging tail of a joke or two, while passing the smoke-room windows on one of Jinny's wild "ploys".

She may have been touched also. At all events she paused, and with a self-possession I had not thought to be in her, faced me, and asked straight out:

"Why don't you like me, Mr. Phil Amory!"

"But of course I do," I answered her. We had pre-empted a vacant space of deck; I remember Jinny was standing, rather tall and very thin, against an indescribably glorious volcano-burst of sunset. I could see nothing of her face; she must have seen mine outlined in sharpest light, no camouflage, no reserves possible.

"You don't," she stated, coolly. "Not after saving my life and all."

"Liking!" I said. "No, I don't *like* you. If I saw more of you, I should—love—you. But liking—that's another thing."

Jinny puzzled this out. She was not used to subtleties. But she could jump to conclusions with fearsome swiftness, and she jumped now, skipping intermediate links.

"I know what you mean by love," she said, and suddenly, coarsely, she turned and spat into the water.

"Do you know," she said—and now she turned so that I could see her face; the bird-like eyes, gold eyes rimmed with dark; the desirous, beautiful mouth,

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the circling hair—"Do you know what the square emerald ring on Pia Laurier's hand is?"

"Ring?" I said stupidly. Most men notice rings scarce at all. I remembered seeing jewels on Pia's tanned brown-satin wrist—or was it on the fingers, with the dainty white V-marks between, where the sun had spared to strike?

"Do you know who set that fashion?"

"I didn't know it was a fashion," I answered, still hopelessly at sea.

"It was Princess Mary—when she got engaged. All the smart girls have wanted square emeralds ever since. Smoke that."

She whirled, one of her dancer whirls, and left me. "Come on, girls," I heard her crying, down the deck. "Get the gramophone going again. 'Nother dance—drink hearty, we'll soon be dead."

So little did I understand what she meant, that I was conscious, at first, only of relief. She had let me go; ceased playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse, that tries to free itself ceaselessly, and ceaselessly is patted back again. I could go where I liked, I could hunt up Pia Laurier, who had not been visible all afternoon. Part of my coinage of golden hours was still unspent; I must husband it, use it wisely. Pia—Jinny—

I was hurrying towards the music-room, an excellent strategic point for viewing the main companion and the decks—when the full meaning of Jinny's remarks, and of her fierce "Smoke that!" broke on me.

Princess Mary had fancied a square emerald for an engagement ring. Princess Mary had made square emerald engagement rings popular, with the set to which Pia Laurier belonged. Pia wore a square emerald

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ring—I remembered—fatally, I remembered now!—on her third left finger.

Three times, then—by my poverty, by her position, and by the significance of that ring—Pia was not for me.

The pure face, the beautiful eyes, had lied, after all. She was a common flirt. I had made myself notorious by my rescue of Jinny Treacher; Miss Laurier had stooped, like a pedigree dog that deigns to rob a mongrel of its bone, and filched away Gin-Sling's little-worth capture. She did not want me, but she had made pretty play of pretending she did—in order to score over Jinny, the devourer of hearts.

I believed what Jinny had said; I was very sure she was no liar. It was merely a determination to leave no stone unturned, that made me decide I would see Pia once more—only once—before I left the ship, and ask her to her face if what I heard was true. Mrs. Kipple had told me—but it seemed Mrs. Kipple was not infallible; few gossips are.

Once, across the saloon that night, I saw the clear profile, the beautifully shaped black head. Once, on deck, the rose-geranium perfume that Pia Laurier used, came floating across a little space of dark, and I saw a pale dress pass—hesitate—go on again. I did not move; I said no word. If I am angry, I am angry. That night, I had liefer taken the velvet neck of Pia in my hands, and twisted it back till it gave way, cracking, in my hands (as I have twisted the neck of a German, rolling together in trench mud), than held her and kissed her as I had not yet done; as, I knew, I never should.

It was very early when the engines came to rest next morning, and the ship, her way stopped, lay

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still upon the celadon-blue waters that surround Goode Island.

Here the tender from Thursday was to meet us, and here my false splendours were to end. Phil Amory, bit of war wastage, trader from the back end of nowhere, was "to be taken to the place from whence he came". And if, once arrived there, he chose to hang himself by the neck till he was dead, it would be nobody's business but his own.

My suitcases were on deck, my steward tipped, the tender rising and falling below the ladder, on which I was just about to set foot, when the sound of my name, clearly and almost precisely spoken, made me look round.

I had meant to go without seeing her again. I had forgotten that there was any feeling save my own, any will but mine, in question, though I might have remembered, since my thought was so set on jewels and what they signified, the meaning of that diamond bracelet of Pia's; the trophy she had won upon Randwick course, struggling, with a tornado in her lungs, and the fury of a thoroughbred stallion barely held in by her small hands, for victory, in a crowd of riders stronger, more ruthless than herself; death at her elbow, defeat, scarcely less bitter, only inches away I might have known that that girl, modern of the moderns, bravest of the brave, would not, like one of her Edwardian forebears, take my defection for granted, and go to her sewing and her prayers.

She did not. She had got up at dawn, dressed herself in something that was like a spray of lilac blossom (though even my inexperience could gauge the alarming value of that piece of French simplicity), and was

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there, at the head of the accommodation ladder, holding out her hand, the hand that did not bear the emerald ring.

I could not refuse to take it. I felt her cool fingers in mine, for one everlasting moment; and it was as if they came, in that moment, home, where they had always belonged. I don't know which of us first let go. I don't know what we said—something about leaving early, and having been busy; words that did not matter at all. I know that in one moment, with the tender dancing below and the luggage gone, and the passengers who were to join coming up the ladder, I realised that I had been an incredible fool, and that it was too late to do anything at all about it. If she was engaged—if she wasn't—she liked me. *Me*. She had not been flirting. Her eyes were dark with sleeplessness, and the shadow that comes of love denied. She looked at me, and made the little movement with her lips that means . . . you know. And I would have given five years of my life for the chance—impossible now—of taking her in my arms and kissing her very breath away.

All round us there were deckhands scrubbing, stewards carrying things, the fourth officer was posted at the head of the ladder, a stewardess, armoured in white starch—God knows what she wanted there—was gaping in the nearest doorway. Passengers, new arrivals, began to shove past Pia and myself, coming between us. "Sir," said some cursed person, "if you want to go ashore, you'd better not keep the tender; captain's anxious to get away." The tender, backing him up, began to roar disgustingly, and on the top of it all the steamer's whistle suddenly bellowed like a thousand bulls.

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I don't know what I'd have done—missed my passage, maybe, and trusted to luck to see me back from the East when I had spent every coin I owned, getting there—if, at that minute, a very tall, thin man had not come up the ladder, pushed determinedly between Pia and myself, and taken her by both hands. He kept pumping her wrists up and down, and staring at her as if he could never have enough of it. He was extremely handsome—sharp regular features, somewhat marred by a brief, George V beard, chestnut hair clipped close to keep it from waving, large, brown, hard eyes, figure of an athlete. I could have cheerfully split his skull with an axe. I knew who he was without asking; but if confirmation was needed, I had it when an obsequious steward rushed forward, treading on my toes as he went, and bleated: "What cabin, Sir Richard? Shall I take your luggage, Sir Richard?"

Instantly the whole weight of the social system by and in which the clan of Lauriers lived, seemed to press down upon me like a giant hand, pushing, relentlessly, Pia and myself apart. I saw in one thousand-faceted vision, the world my people had owned and lost; its myriad reserves, defences, shibboleths, its fierce prides and pitiless scorns; its solid pedestal of property, lifting all who belonged to it far, very far above the mud and dust in which we others must go.

I saw the stately rhythm of Laurier life, English in solidity and harmony, Australian in its startling freedoms, such as that which permitted Pia to ride and win amateur races in public; but always the same, always unalterably convinced of its own essential rightness and sufficiency. I saw the rebel wildness

of my own, the gypsy spirit in it that was as the salt of life to me, and realised, as I had not done before, the price I paid for all that. I had been fool enough to think I had it free. . . . Folly! what was ever given free on earth?

The tense moment passed. Sir Richard had let go Pia's hand; was busying himself with the traveller's eternal preoccupation of baggage. I had seen what I had seen, and I knew, as well as if I had had an hour to think it all out, instead of a couple of seconds, that what was—for Pia—was best. I could wreck her engagement if I chose—of this I was sure—but I was equally sure that if I could, I would not. I would drop out of her world as I had dropped in. The male Cinderella's pumpkin coach was ready; his hour had struck; back to the ashes!—and let the fairy princess stay in her palace, undisturbed.

If I was sick at heart, as I went down that endless stair, I was doubtless no worse than many millions elsewhere who were sick of heart that day, and of the same disease. So I tried to tell myself, when the tender was reached, and I had found a seat on the roof of the cabin, and the engine was beginning to turn over with loud spitting and drumming noises. So I tried to believe, when I saw the face of Pia looking down at me from the rail, a long, long way above, and felt her eyes fall on me like the light of a star, strange, sad, remotely fair. I, who was merry enough by nature, had no laughter left in me that day, else I think I must have been amused at the sudden sight of Mrs. Laurier, arrived too late, shooting her celebrated death-ray at me "with intent," as she stood, kimono-clad, in the alleyway door. Or at the other, fairer vision on the ship's sacred bridge—I knew at once that

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only Jinny could thus profane the high altar—holding an imaginary glass to its lips, waving an arm at me, and shouting what I guessed at, but could not hear—“Drink hearty, we’ll soon be dead!”

Then the tender champed and fussed away, and the ship receded faster and faster, and that chapter in my life was done.

CHAPTER III

THE MANGROVE WALL

I CAME back to Darn, off Western Papua, on a brimming tide, that masked the mud-flats with acres of reflected island, miles of bright mirrored sky. The lawns, green as lettuce, the leaning palms, the red roofs of the little, tin-built houses, showed clear as pictures in stained glass, above and below the tide-line. The high, angry sky—there is always a threat of storm about the skies of Daru—seemed to fill heaven and earth, as I ran, scattering clouds beneath the fore-foot of the cutter, to my anchorage. Over against the island, that lay there piping its weak note of protest against the savagery of stone age Papua, ran—long, mysterious, dusk—the curving mangrove wall that flings defiance in the face of civilisation; lifts, to the ear attuned, its own gigantic organ sound, singing things primal, never-to-be-changed. . . . And if you think that, in this, I speak of the rustle of leaves, sounds of water lapsing downward through twisted roots to sea, I ask your pardon. I have, ill-manneredly, used in your presence a language that is not yours. Pass on. . . .

The dream that I had dreamed on the great liner clung about me still, but only as the aftermath of an opium carouse may cling about a man who has left behind him, days and miles away, the place where he

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drank, and dreamed. With every hour, the memory of those wild visions grows weaker; incredible blossoms, great as thrones in a fairy palace, and gemmed with dew outspangling diamonds and emeralds; piled wonders of tower on tower, of crystal mile-long windows, crepitating with light; marvel of faces fairer than the face

‘That launched a thousand ships’,

and limbs more beautiful than flowers that float in a mountain lake at dawn—these fade. The dreamer sheds the last thin, iridescent rags of his dream; stands bare to the bare, grey world once more.

So it was with me, when I reached the Daru roadstead. I anchored, slung my dinghy out (for I had made the hundred and twenty mile run across from Australia alone), got pratique from the thin, young Government official who rowed out to meet me, changed with him the news of the island—native dances; catches of dugong; patrols gone out up the Fly, patrols come back; batches of prisoners from the cannibal tribes inland; (“Keep me a good cooky out of the lot,” I begged, knowing that your tamed man-eater is matchless in the kitchen)—calls of the schooner ‘*Aramea*,’ calls of the tiny ‘*Papuan Chief*’ from Port Moresby—news of the latest “exploring” expedition from England or America, which had gone, as they mostly go, up to somebody’s plantation and somebody else’s police camp, and hurried home to collect the acclamations of the British public, on the fact of having ventured “where never white man trod before”; rumours, wild but true, concerning the deeds of the A.R.M.’s (Asst. Res. Magistrates) with half a handful of police, and a tucker-box or

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two, weeks beyond the mysterious regions of the Alice River, in the genuine unknown—all this, and more, I heard, while we sat cheerfully on the cutter's hatch, my dinghy and the official whaleboat lying still as "painted ships upon a painted ocean," the pipe of peace in Purchase's mouth and mine, and in our hearts the leisure and the "long, long thoughts" that live outback, and outback only.

By and by, I slung my gear together, looked to the cable of the cutter, rowed myself ashore and pulled the dinghy up on the stones. Purchase had gone ahead with his police; I walked alone up the endless stretch of Daru jetty. The tide, now, was running fast away to sea, and the coming sunset was reflected in sheets of muddy flame upon the flats left bare. I had slipped through the magic door, got myself into the Fourth Dimensional world that lies beyond the world that most men know. Time here was not time. Life was subtly changed; oneself was changed. And what one wanted—what we all wanted, the A.R.M.'s and patrol officers with their amazing, terrible journeys; the traders who lived lives devoid of comfort and amusement; the men who were neither true trader nor Government officer, just gypsies like myself—was the thing that one can never define, though one give one's body to be destroyed, and one's soul to be starved, for love of it—the "Something Lost", of which a greater than I has told.

"Something lost behind the ranges,
Something waiting for you"

If the thought of Pia Laurier came back to me, in my trading store, behind the beach of Daru, I think

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it came as a chime of bells comes, from some distant clock-tower, sounding often, scarcely heard; part of one's life, yet scarcely remembered, unless, for any reason, its music is withdrawn. Possibly I would have told anyone who asked, that I did not think of her.

She had gone through my life—it seemed—as a sudden gust of wind goes through a house, scattering the common things of hourly use, breaking the mirrors, slamming windows and doors, sending papers and letters away down streets, and making the place look as if nothing would ever be the same again.

But winds pass by, and household gods are gathered and set up once more. The wind that was Pia had blown, and passed—I thought.

One trace it had left. I could not keep from thinking of Sir Richard Fanshawe. He troubled me. Not so much because he was going to marry Pia, though that was a spot of raw pain, never unnecessarily to be touched—but because of a certain, odd, floating resemblance in his face to something, someone undetermined, that had struck me, in those few moments upon the ladder of the ship. It worried me as a name, half-forgotten, worries; and that is like a loose tooth in the mouth. . . . You remember. . . . "I know the *shape* of the name—I know it begins with E—it's a soft name—fluffy—had it there, almost!—come out, come out!—I'll remember it in a minute—gone again, damn!—E—E—Eb, Ec, Ed, Ef, Eg,—*What* is it—Hang the thing, I'll forget about it; it doesn't matter anyhow. What was I doing before?" Driven away, the worry returns like a wasp, buzzing and darting, utterly trivial, yet utterly maddening.

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Only one remedy—to find out the name; catch the wasp and beat it flat. . . .

I could not catch my wasp.

It troubled me at the oddest moments. My store—I think I have not told you—was almost on the beach. It stood perched upon high piles, with a flight of rough steps leading up and in. There were palm trees all round it; they made, day through and night through, the dry-papery rustle that only palms can make. The interior was one large dusk cave, with light that fell from doors set at each end. At first, you didn't see much; in a minute or two, the shining clusters of tin billycans and pannikins in the roof, and the piled strata of cottons, red, yellow, pink and green, and the loin-cloths and the yard-long knives, and the strings of beads, like strange little fruits and the plates and the lanterns and the sacks of rice and the towers of tinned meats and fish, became dimly visible, each in its place.

There was always a wind blowing through, from door to door, and the red loin-cloths, festooned on strings, were always waving gently in it and the billycans lightly swinging, with a sound like the beat of tiny cymbals. And there was a mossy and fishy smell from the reef, not unpleasant, and a warm whiff of frangipanni flowers; for Daru is full of these. And through the two doors, there used to come a dazzle of furious green, green that burned, and after mid-day, the plate-glass glitter of the sea. . . . Daru, Daru by the western boundary of Papua, where civilisation stops, ships come seldom, and time is marked by rise and set of sun—Daru, an island, filled with the spirit of the islands, holds in its heart, though it is Western Pacific, the secret of the true South Seas.

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All very well, and I felt it, as I moved about among my cottons and tins, bargaining with wild fellows from the Fly for a canoe load of coconuts, selling tinned meat for turtle-shell, rice for a catch of trocas. I felt it, and liked it, for I had tasted the honey of the South Sea world, and its flavour was pleasant to recall, though in truth the strong liquor of the Western Islands suited me best. But why—why was the store, and the blaze of green bush and dazzle of sea-water, seen through its open doorway, and the smells of reef and shell and frangipanni flower—ay, and the very winds that blew unendingly from door to door—why was all this connected in my mind with Richard Fanshawe, airman, company promoter, wealthy man and future custodian of Pia Laurier's life?

I could not tell. Often I did not think of it. I was reasonably busy as a trader, and my beat, up and down the coast in the cutter, was a long one; the crucial peak of solvency had just been reached, and passed, and I was beginning to send money up to Port Moresby Bank. Not much, heaven knows—when I had bought new stock with most of my windfall, and got the cutter's engine repaired with the rest, I hadn't more than ten pounds left to the good. But still, it was prosperity, or the dawn of that pleasant condition; and it promised, in due time, the fulfilment of my dream of exploration. Nothing in the world to do with Sir Richard Fanshawe, far above me and my little affairs, as Pia Laurier was above us both.

Where was the connection? I would have given much to know. But weeks passed, and I was no nearer recalling the vague, three-parts forgotten

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thing that linked Sir Richard Fanshawe to Daru and its sea-scents and windy doorways, and my little trading store.

And now I have to relate when, and in what manner, enlightenment came.

The Residency at Daru stands, like all other Daru houses (I think there are ten altogether) in its own garden. Cannas, orange and vermillion, flame against the foliage of the red and white hibiscus bushes; purple monkey-face masses itself low down, among stems of forest lilies and pink ginger flowers; there's the bush with the lilac flowers and the little lemon-coloured berries; there's allamanda—gold cups as big as a tumbler top, faintly sweet, like honey of last year. There are roses, washed pale by the hot rains of Daru; orchids, tied to verandah posts, and miraculously living on mere air. They all go on, flowering sometimes freely, sometimes sparsely, but flowering always. It's always hot and very bright of a morning, sometimes hot and wet of afternoons. It's always green, green beyond anything that one can paint or tell. The marvellous croton alley-ways that lead to the Residency are Daru's glory. They are thirty years old—and hardly anything in the Territory is thirty years old, let me tell you; so that takes one back to the very Dark Ages of the island. Trees five-and-twenty feet high, coloured crimson-lake, custard, claret, vermillion, blood-orange, mustard, primrose, garnet, the red that's in red church windows when the sun shines through, the yellow that's in the flames of a coal fire on a windy night, trees that shine brighter in the rain, and seem to be almost radio-active when the sudden dusk of Daru falls in a minute, and leaves the croton avenues showing up, still red and yellow,

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in half dark. . . . If I were a tree-worshipper (I don't know that I am not) I could say my prayers to the croton walks of Daru.

I had gone up, through this never-failing wonder of leafy flame, to the Residency, on an afternoon when there was something doing more than usual; the R.M. was back from a wild patrol beyond the utmost rim of civilisation or knowledge; an A.R.M. and a patrol officer happened to be "in" at the same time, and this was an occurrence so unusual as to warrant, fairly, a dinner-party. David Bassett, the R.M., a very good friend of mine, had sent a prisoner to my store with a note:

"Dear Amory,

"Come round to dinner if you can. Northanger and Purchase are back. No particular food, but a good deal of yarning. Have you an egg? If so send or bring it, 'under careful escort.'

"Yours,

"D. BASSETT."

I sent him all the eggs I could muster. In Papua, you must know, eggs are the test of popularity, the medium by which friendship, servility, hope, esteem, all find expression. You borrow eggs from prudent people; beg them from anyone who you think may be fool enough to give; buy where you can (but that is seldom), present to your sweetheart, your chum, your friend in hospital; bring, with a servile grin, to the man in high position, the man who has lent you money, or can get you promotion. Eggs, in Papua, are the true social barometer. . . . I had eggs, and always gave Bassett some when he asked for them.

Bassett was R.M. and could be useful to me; besides which, I liked him; furthermore, on this occasion, I was going to be asked to eat the eggs, or help to do so.

Following my eggs, I went up to the Residency, and found my way, unannounced, into the mosquito-room, so named illogically, because it is not supposed to harbour mosquitos. Several men, like large joints of meat enclosed in a rather small meat safe, were sitting within the transparent hessian walls. I had expected three, but I saw four. Who else, besides Northanger and Purchase, I wondered, was "in"? The schooner *Aramea* had just crossed from Thursday Island, but I hadn't heard that anyone was expected.

"Hallo, here's Black Sheep," somebody said; and my host began introducing.

"Northanger, Purchase, you know the Black Sheep; Mr. Spicer, Mr. Amory."

The newcomer—he was a fattish man with extremely flat feet and a sleeked head of fairish hair; young, good-looking in a disgusting sort of way, and dowered with an excess of the manner sometimes mis-called "Oxford"—fixed me with a cool stare, and demanded of the R.M., "Why do you call him Black Sheep?"

"Mostly because his eyes are black, and his hair, and partly because he's a decent sort of chap," replied Bassett, staring back at the fattish man.

Mr. Spicer immediately dropped me out of notice, took a watch from his pocket, and yawned.

Bassett rang the bell for dinner.

"Who is he?" I asked, in a whisper, of Northanger, as we went into the dinner-room, a clean, polished,

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rather prison-like apartment, that shouted in every foot of its barren expanse its owner's bachelor condition.

"Fellow who's come across to make arrangements for some mineral prospecting crowd," answered Northanger, a little wearily. "They're going to——"

"Explore the country," I filled in.

"Yes, and cross——"

"From Papua to the other side," I answered, like a chorus.

"And go where never a——"

"Never a white man's been before."

"Exactly," answered the A.R.M., with the tired expression still prominent. We filed in. "Why did you ask him?" I found time to demand of Bassett. And Bassett, looking at me with large, sad eyes, answered simply, "I never did; he wished himself on to the party," and took his seat.

Through the turtle soup—we are usually sick of turtle soup in Daru—through the fish (we are almost always tired of fish, because we get it plentifully, and free), through the roast of dugong, and the inevitable custard pudding and tinned pears, Mr. Spicer talked, with just so many pauses as would allow of his eating an excellent dinner. It seemed that he had acquaintances among most of the titled families of England; that they all valued him highly, and that he had been chosen to come ahead and "organise" the expedition, by a mass meeting of marquesses, dukes, and earls.

"This," he did not forget to tell us, "is Empiah stuff. Nothing colonial about it. Development of the British Empiah, on which the sun never sets."

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"Our chief, Sir Richard Fanshawe——"

At this point, my slack attention tightened. "Your *what?*" I rapped. "Who did you say?" For I thought—being bored half asleep—that my ears were playing me false. So often had that name hummed in my head, between sleeping and waking, that I could not believe I was hearing it actually spoken by some one else.

"Sir Richard Fanshawe, K.C.V.O. Celebrated airman in the War. Extremely successful manager of companies devoted to the extension of Empiah interests. Chief in this matter, if anyone is chief but myself. I expect him to follow very shortly, via Port Moresby."

"I don't know that I've heard——" began Bassett doubtfully; but Spicer cut him short.

"Then you ought to have heard. Certainly you ought. You hear now. Sir Richard Fanshawe, K.C.V.O. I expect him——"

I don't know what it was—maybe the new interest, the fresh channel of feeling opened up, by Spicer and his talk; maybe the mention, from an unexpected quarter, of Fanshawe's name—but something, at that moment, set off a fuse beneath the long dormant part of my memory, and exploded it into action. I knew, with certainty, where and how I had seen Sir Richard Fanshawe before—my God, I knew!

In the glass that hung opposite the table, I saw my face turn to something like a piece of white blotting-paper, with black blots for eyes and brows. I didn't know that I saw it; I remembered that after. At the moment, I was only concerned with getting out of the house. Spicer, the R.M., Northanger and Purchase, might all have been taken out and drowned

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together in a bag, for what I cared. There was nothing that I cared about, nothing that I knew, save that mad instinct to bolt off the course and get away.

We had done dinner, and were just moving back into the miscalled mosquito-room. I touched my host on the shoulder.

"Sorry," I lied, "but I've got a touch of fever; I'll have to go home."

"Hard luck. Have a whisky?" was Bassett's response. I shook my head.

"Quinine?"

"Not now, thanks."

"You do look most awfully sick, Black Sheep. Better get to bed; you might be going down with blackwater."

"Night!" I said, and slipped away. As I descended the verandah steps, the loud, high voice of Spicer was still holding forth. "Where you have failed," he was telling Northanger and Purchase, who had mapped out enough new country to deserve a dozen R.G.S. medals—"Where you have all of you given way—" (there was not a man in the room but had performed feats of surprise, attack, capture among the wild cannibals of the interior, enough to furnish plots to a dozen "movies") "I shall succeed; I and my chief. We shall plant the flag of the British Empiah where never flag has waved before. We are organised; prepared, for anything that may happen. What we expect to find. . . ."

I remember wondering, as I went through the garden and into the croton walk, at a dog-trot, if Spicer and his gang, perchance, had picked up some rumour of the secret that was my capital and my hope. I

remember telling myself that it did not matter if they had. Nothing mattered except what I had, with shock and horror unspeakable, recalled.

The house was too small for me, that night. I did not go home. Under the great stars, I found the island's main roadway, a stately avenue bordered by mango trees that in daylight were huge domes of fiery green, by night, a wall that blotted half the sky.

The fourteen whites of Daru, the few score Papuan prisoners, the village folk who, in daylight, passed up and down from the stores, were all under cover, most of them asleep. The world, beneath the immense black shadow of the mangoes, was left to me.

I don't know how far I walked, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, along that half-mile of blackness with a ribbon of stars running through. I did not want to pass on to the open country beyond; I wanted to be hidden—to recall, here in the loneliness and the dark, every least detail that had to do with the thing I remembered.

. . . . Nineteen — nineteen the year; myself, newly demobilised, spending my gratuity money in a hurried trip through the South Sea Islands that I, in common with thousands of others, had always wished to know. Impatience, I remembered, with the big ports of Samoa and Fiji, that were, after all, so much like other tropical places. Somebody who said: "You should have seen The Islands years ago, before the War—ten years before. They're not what they were. Too many dashed tourists now. If you can handle boats, get a cutter with a bit of a cabin, and go away back. Where from? Anywhere almost."

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Out of reach of steamers and Cook tickets, that's all. . . ."

The cutter hired; a native or two engaged as crew. Weeks, then, of the happiness I had come far to seek. "Through the Looking Glass", I had gone like the child in the immortal tale—and everything now was magically changed. With delight, I learned what life can be when that tyrant, Time, is toppled off his throne; how rich one suddenly becomes in all the things that matter—how a morning may be a minute long, or a century, and in either case filled with joy to the edges, and spilling over. How the sun of midday, honey-thick and honey-yellow, can look, through leaves green as shoal water, when you lie on your mat of pandanus, all the hot hours of the day, because it is just and reasonable so to lie, with the moon-blanced night of ten hours long awaiting you, and the fishing, and the swimming, and the dancing and drinking and eating and loving, under the moon, to come. How the song of the canoes, skimming the reef-water with chant and beat of drum, from brown men and women, with rattle and plunge of paddles in water blue as blue flowers, can steal into your heart, and all by itself, sing there, melodies never written for the ears of those who live in the lands of Cold and Time. How in the year that is a day, and the day that is a year, a man perhaps may lose his way, drop the clues that lead through the tangled maze called Life, and wander, timeless, aimless, till the dark. . . .

This I learned and much more, which may have left its mark; helped towards the finding of my own fate, later on. For the South Sea Islands, the darling South Sea Islands, were not my final joys. I sickened of their honey; I looked for a more fiery draught.

But whatever it was, I knew—as I have always known—that I could drink it from no cup save that of freedom.

It must have been about the sixth month of my journeying, when, with money running low, and mind almost sated with tropic beauties and wonders—so that I began to think I might soon, without regret, return to civilisation—I came upon a group of islands that I shall call Omega.

There is a town in the Omega group; a town that, for reasons I cannot give here, offers more commercial interests and possibilities than most island places. This is important, and should be remembered; it has to do with what I am going to tell.

The town appealed to me but little. It was the outer part of the archipelago that drew me; thin atoll islands, barren and very bright; islets with here and there a coconut palm, and here and there a lost melancholy looking pandanus tree; shoal waters that were mauve and sapphire, pearl and celadon-green. I had bought the cutter by this time, with a small windfall of a legacy that came my way, and I had just enough money left to run her for a few more weeks. I hadn't cash for anything of a crew, however, save one old silly fellow who was willing to come without wages. He professed to know the group from end to end, and though I was a little doubtful of his knowledge, I could not afford to quarrel with it, or him. After all, I thought, we shall get somewhere, and come away somehow, and that's all one really wants. . . .

If I had known!

It was on a windy, wicked afternoon, with high clouds flying; that we got blown away from our

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course, such as it was; obliged to abandon all attempt to get to the group of atolls for which I had been aiming. The cutter had been cheap, and was a bit crazy; if you sailed her too hard, she was in the habit of leaking—these last few weeks. We had taken in as much water as I thought we could afford; the sea was getting the better of the bailing. By sundown, I had decided to give it up; close-reef, and run before the wind till dawn. There was, so far as I knew, nothing in our way, and Omega itself was within a couple of hundred miles, if we had to put right back again.

I gave the tiller into the hand of Taviti, the "crew", slung my two sleeping-boards across the seats, and lay down with a rice sack under my head. Taviti was to call me at moonrise, which I judged to be about ten o'clock.

I didn't sleep for a while. The cutter pitched violently in the cross sea raised by tide and wind, hammering with her bows on the water till you might have thought she would stove herself in. Taviti, with the sheet in one hand and his toes on the tiller, squatted aft, singing, in his old-man voice, an island song as windy and wild as the cries of the gulls that followed us. When I opened my eyes, which was often, I could see the black clouds streaming across the blacker sky, and stars between, that seemed to sail and scurry, too; and the white edges of the breaking waves; and Taviti's light loincloth, rising and falling against the dark. It looked like ugly weather, I thought and then, of a sudden, I slept.

I was awakened by the smothering dash of salt water over my head, and a blow from the cutter's gunwale, that got me in the ribs as I was being swept

overboard. Everything about me was white foam and swaling water; I felt sand beneath my toes, but could not grip it, because the short, breaking waves had me at their will, and were knocking me about as a child batters a toy. I fought, and got foothold at last. The cutter was lying on her side, smashing her mast and rigging as she swayed about with the seas. Taviti was just crawling out on to a stone, like a rat escaped from the drowning-pail. There was high moon above us—it must have been near one o'clock—and I could see a bit of stony, sandy coast, and a belt of coconuts. Just what you see on a thousand islands of a hundred island groups. Nothing that was not like all the rest.

"Where are we?" I shouted to Taviti, as I crawled out beside him. There was no use scolding him for his careless handling of the boat, now. I never had been one of those who either weep over spilt milk, or try to lick it up. Low tide would strand the cutter; till then, one could do little or nothing.

"I d'know, Ariki (chief)," mournfully answered the old man. Then, with a burst of animation—"I think we somewhere."

"Well, wherever we are," I said, "the first thing to do is to get the cable of the boat fast to something." And that, with considerable difficulty, we did, securing what was left of her to one of the big black stones, so that she might not be carried away by outgoing tide. Taviti, after this, found a little hole—you could hardly call it cave—among the rocks, and dragged himself into it, covering his lean, wet body, so far as he could, with a mass of seaweed.

"Ariki, very good we stay here; by-n'-by sun come up, we go look-see," he piped.

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"You can stay," I told him; and left him there, while I started to explore the place, and find out, if I could, where Taviti's mad seamanship, backed by my own carelessness, had landed me. The worst of it was that I knew next to nothing of Omega or its outlying islands, large and small. I had drifted there by chance, while conveying myself and my cutter from Fiji by trading steamer to quite another port. The call at Omega was unexpected; equally unexpected my snap decision to stop there. And now, I was reaping the fruit of what seemed a very foolish impulse.

Leaving the boat to await low tide, I tramped inland from the beach. It was not much past full moon time; and nowhere on earth's surface does the moon shine with more effect than on a coral island. Surrounding sea, enclosed lagoon, white beach, all throw back the light-rays like so many mirrors; you walk in a spray of melted silver; the palms above you toss off light from glassy leaves, like a fountain throwing myriad crops of crystal. I could see everything about me almost as plainly as in the day. And I did not like what I saw.

It is easy to say that I am influenced, looking back, by the things that happened after; that I merely fancy I didn't care for the place at first sight. Easy, but not true. There are such things as warnings; and if ever I felt a warning, it was then. There was nothing at all in front of me but a belt of grassy soil, sprinkled with palms and low hibiscus bushes; an inner lagoon gleamed faintly through the trees, and rocks, here and there, sticking up like little minarets or spires, showed the soil to be barren. Nothing else—but I felt (how shall I put it?) that this place was not

good to be in. The trees were like the trees you see in a nightmare; one did not wish to be alone with them. The inner lake gleamed like an angry eye.

There was a personality about the place—everyone has felt such things, though few care to say so—and it was distinctly hostile.

Of course, that did not stop me from exploring; I had to find out where we were. Further, I was wet through, without a change; it was a tropic night, but tropic nights, with high wind blowing, can be unpleasantly cool, and I shivered a bit, as I tramped the rough, blown grasses; I should have been glad of a house wherein I might take shelter, and find somebody's clothes to borrow. I rather thought the island was inhabited. In the moonlight, I had seen traces of footsteps, or what looked like footsteps, in the grass; I had seen a pile of coconuts heaped up at the foot of a palm. . . .

Wandering natives might have accounted for both, but somehow, that was not my opinion. All South Sea travellers know there is a front and a back to every island; I judged that we had been spilt ashore (for you could not call it wrecked) at the back of this place, whatever it might be. I tramped, and shivered, and continued in my search for the front.

It would have been about twenty minutes after landing, when I was getting well warmed up with exercise, that I ran across the houses. I struck them quite unexpectedly, coming on them as they lay in a shallow depression, with their peaked roofs clear against the moon and the inner salt lake of the atoll. They were two or three only, mere hovels thrown together of brushwood and palm. About them a few bananas of the coarser kind struggled to maintain

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existence; the big leaves battered about in the night-wind, with a sound like clapping of hands, and I saw a flying-fox, most evil of all things that make the dark their day, skim, with winnowing black wings and pointed muzzle clear against the stars, among the dangling fruits.

The houses seemed to me to be semi-alive, crouching, as if afraid of my approach. It may have been this fancy that urged me to take care, walk delicately, as I neared them. Most were unlighted; from one, however, came a faint red gleam through plaited walls. Somebody, within, was waking, while the rest of the island slept.

The wind had risen, was still rising. It made an intolerable clamour now among the palm tree tops, thrashing about the higher crests, and beating the lower ones against the roof of an iron copra shed that stood a little way off, ice-white beneath the moon. Masked by the noise, I walked right up to the house-wall, and peered through a chink.

I do not know what I expected to see; something astonishing, certainly—but whatever it may have been, it was less amazing than the reality. Looking inside the hut, I saw no native chief, no beautiful brown girl, no heap of hidden treasure—and mind you—I was so worked up with the accident, and the wind, and the queer place where we had landed, that I was ready to expect and believe in any or all of these things.

I saw a white man like myself; a well-bred looking man, with a beard, brown eyes, and wavy brown hair. He was dressed in a most extraordinary rig—loincloth and jumper, such as the natives use, but of a pattern never worn by any native of the Pacific world, yellow, with spots of black as big as dinner

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plates. Ugly, conspicuous in the last degree—and so coarse in texture that its folds were stiff as canvas.

"Ought to last a lifetime, that rig," I thought. "Bad sort of thing to go shooting or fishing in; anything alive would spot you a hundred yards off. Why in Tophet does he wear it?"

The question was no sooner asked than answered. He wasn't going to wear it—any longer than he could help. He had been busy packing a small bag, when I looked in; now, snapping the lock, he began pulling off his hideous shirt, and loosening the loin-cloth. Hung up on a rafter beside him, I saw a European suit, crumpled and earth-stained; it looked almost as if it had been buried and dug up again.

The crack was narrow; I stretched forward to look through, and managed, somehow, to stagger against the flimsy hut wall. It creaked and bent in as if it had been made of paper. The man must have seen it move; with his arm half out of his shirt, he made a snatch at a revolver that was lying beside the bag, and swung round, eyes glaring like a cat's when it sees prey, to face the spot where I was standing.

I did not stand long. Covered by the noise of the wind, I bolted as hard as I could go for a tussock of hibiscus bush, and dropped into it. By the time the man had got out of the hut, I was lying low, safe among interlaced stems, and peering through. If I died for it, I was going to know what all this was about.

There were dozens of tussocks near the house; he must have seen the futility of trying to search them. He stood in the doorway, outlined by the smoky flame of his hurricane lamp, and staring wildly about. The spotted-leopard clothes were fastened again;

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they looked very odd, with the socks and boots he was wearing, and the hat he held in one hand. It was a handsome, well-bred hand, but the little finger, I noticed, had a defective and broken nail.

"Black," he called in a cautious voice that scarcely carried through the wind. "Black—was that you?" I thought he rather hoped it was Black; was arguing with himself that it couldn't have been anyone else.

A freakish humour seized me. I slipped out at the back of the tussock and showed my head.

"Yes," I answered, aware that no man could identify another in that light, under trees, at fifty yards distance.

"What the devil are you playing about, then?"

"Don't want to be seen," I answered truthfully.

This seemed to satisfy him, more or less. "Is the launch there?" he asked presently. I said it was.

"Go and get everything ready to start. I'll be down in two minutes."

This was awkward. I could not be sure of safety, once I left the shelter of the bushes. Black might be inches taller or shorter, stones heavier or lighter, than I. I hesitated, uncertain what to do.

It seemed that the man in the hut could not endure delay. "What are you messing and waiting about?" he demanded, with an oath. "If I'm caught, so are you, and it's five years on the breakwater."

("So I'm supposed to be committing a crime. I wonder what?" I thought.) The freakish devil that had possession of me prompted me to reply—at a venture, "What about the money?"

This let loose a surprising flood of profanity. I judged that Mr. Black, whoever he was, had been exacting in his demands.

"Money?" (Fiery interval.) "Money? What do you want? Five hundred already, and another five when you land me in Valparaiso." ("Crumbs! Valparaiso—in a launch!" I thought. "Whom has he been murdering?")

"—And all the cursed expenses into the bargain, and you want more!"

"No," I shouted across the wind. "No. I'm going off to the launch."

The conversation, I thought, was growing too exacting; not much longer should I be able to keep up my end of it—and then, there was that revolver, in the hands of what seemed to be a desperate man. A cloud was coming over the moon. I waited till it touched, then made a bolt. "Hurry up," I shouted, as I ran away, devoutly hoping that he would do nothing of the kind.

"This," I thought, "is clearly an island inhabited by criminals or madmen. Yet I haven't heard of any convict station nearer than New Caledonia. I give it up." I was almost back on the sea-beach by now; it occurred to me that I might as well shin up one of the palm-trees, and see whether there was really anything in this talk of a launch. I didn't think there was; my theory was rather that I had run across a particularly unpleasant kind of madman.

"No one but a lunatic," I argued, "would wear such clothes; and I daresay the talk about launches and thousands of pounds is only another phase of it. *Folie des grandeurs*, they call that sort of thing."

The palm I had chosen was tall, but a little bent with age. I had not much difficulty in wriggling my way up into the crown. The worst of it was the way in which the leaves kept hitting at me, driven by the

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wind—a blow from a twenty-foot palm front, ribbed with vegetable steel, is no trifle, and I had trouble in keeping clear. Up at last, and hanging precariously on to a mass of stems and flowers, I waited for clear moonlight, and made my survey.

“Gosh!” I exclaimed. There was undoubtedly a launch, if one may so designate a fine thirty or forty ton boat, schooner rigged, and fitted with an engine; well able to make the run to Valparaiso, or anywhere else, in competent hands. She was lying some way out at sea, on the leeward side of the island, beyond the inner lagoon. I could see a dinghy, like a little black water beetle, creeping landwards from her side.

“That,” I thought, “will be Black. I wonder what the two of them will make of it when they get together?” And the thought so intrigued me, that I fell to laughing, and nearly lost my hold.

But when I had got down safe to ground again, I was more than sobered by the thought that came almost immediately: “If what he said is true—if he has given a man called Black a thousand pounds, and expenses—Crumbs, what expenses they’ll be!—to run him out of this, there must have been dirty work somewhere, and I’m mixed up in it.” I could not help remembering, somewhat unpleasantly, the remark about “five years on the breakwater.”

Omega, I must tell you—but I will tell no more than I must—belongs to a non-British power, which has a short way with offenders against its rather Draconic code of laws. I didn’t know what you could be sent to the breakwater for, but I knew there was one, in an out-of-the-way Omegan port, and I guessed that labour of the Portland Island kind,

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conducted under a tropical sun, was likely to be the kind of thing a wise man should avoid at any cost.

Standing at the foot of the palm, with the windy warm moonlight night all about me, and never a soul but myself visible on all the long stretch of empty shore, I thought the matter out at length. I could arrive at only one conclusion. Whole knowledge was better than half. Whatever the risks might be of exploring yet further this odd, unpleasant place, it would be well for me to find out as much as possible, as soon as possible and (but that went without saying) get away as soon as possible afterwards.

Once more I climbed the palm; swung out among the 'clashing stems among the swaying butts of the leaves, and looked for the launch. She was off, a long way out to sea, I saw her gliding, black in the silver path of the moon.

"Good," I thought, and slid down again. A few minutes rapid walking found me once more among the little, sinister houses, with their horned gables and their air of being huddled together for some evil deed. The hut that had been lighted was dark now. I lit a match, from the small reserve I always kept in a bottle, and looked in. No one was there. The place bore signs of hurried desertion—a stretcher-bed overturned, with bedclothes flung on the ground, a cabin trunk gaping open, and gutted; piles of grey ash suggesting papers destroyed. I looked at the trunk to see if there was a name on it, or even a label; but it had been scraped bare, with the plain intent of leaving no trace behind.

In the middle of the floor lay a loincloth and a shirt of coarse cotton, bright yellow, with black spots as big as plates.

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I stood in the doorway and looked, till my match burned out. I did not strike another. I walked away, and left the deserted hut to itself. And once more, mastering as a drug, and heavy as a dream, came over me that definite presage of ill.

In the little hollow there were fifteen other houses, all small and rudely built of bush material. I looked at them for a minute, swallowed in my throat—for something very like fear had me—and then, thinking no longer, but driving myself as one used to do “over the top”, in the hour after dawn, I found a coconut stump for a torch, lit it, and carried it, flaring furiously in the diminished wind, to the first of the houses.

The door was not shut. I held the torch above my head, and looked in. I looked for quite a long time at what I saw, making sure that I understood it, and that my eyes had not in any way misled me. Then, dashing out the torch against the ground, I fled for the sea—the clean sea. It seemed to me that to be drowned in that clean sea would be a fate a man needn't quarrel with—a fate ten thousand times better than the horror I had left behind.

The tide was down, and the cutter aground. I cannot tell with what anxiety I examined her. I would almost have set sail on a tree-trunk, if nothing else could be had—to get away. . . .

Beyond all belief, I found the hull sound enough to float, with a bit of bailing. The mast was smashed, but I thought we could rig one up with the boom, setting the jib behind it. I went to look for Taviti; found him sleeping peaceably in his hole, and dragged him out by one leg.

“Hurry, Taviti,” I urged. “The tide's on the turn,

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and we'll never get the boat down unless we catch it. She'll float. Come on."

"Ariki," he objected. "Me old, me hungerry, want to go look for some house I get kai-kai" (food).

There was nothing for it but a lie. I had already decided that Taviti should know nothing; what he did not know, he could not spread abroad.

"This is a desert island," I told him, coolly. "No house, no garden. I think it's a bad place, too—a place of ghosts" (and here I dropped into expressive island Maori). "There are ghost islands about Omega, aren't there?"

This was a snap shot, but I knew Island ways. It hit the target.

"Yes, yes, Ariki," whimpered Taviti, beginning to cringe. "Plenty ghost islands. Bad islands. Kaviri one bad island. Turi another. Raka, Lumeala——"

"Yes," I interrupted. "Do you know them all?"

"Me know one, two. No altogether."

"Do you know Turi?"

"Ariki, I dono him."

"Well, you know it now. This is Turi. Full of ghosts, up to the brim and spilling over. Let's get away, sharp. And you can pick a few coconuts to take along, if you're as hungry as all that. Not the coconuts on the ground, Taviti! . . . Those are ghost coconuts. Get them off the tree."

We loaded the boat with nuts, and started work on the broken mast. I was mad to get away. It was not yet dawn but the moon seemed paling, and I heard, among the palm tree tops inland, the first faint notes of waking parrakeets.

If—"They"—were to hear us—if "They" came out, my secret was lost. And I had some idea, by this

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time, as to how the Power that owned Omega regarded people who poked inquisitive noses into secrets; how they might be likely to treat me, if I was caught.

The moon was still shining, the stars still to be seen, when we got the cutter afloat; but the eastern sky had begun to look as though a city, filled with light, lay somewhere just below the sweep of the horizon. From the salt lagoon in the distant middle of the island, came a long harsh call, rising and soaring above the tops of the trees—"Rawky! Rawky! Ra-a-awky!"—from sea-birds newly awake. It was truly time to go.

Taviti and I got the large fairweather jib set, with the gaff for boom, and got under way. In the new yellow dawn, a mile distant, I saw the island clearly—small, low, pricked with palms; one like a thousand others. And I judged that Taviti would never know he had landed on Turi, after all.

Back again in Omega, I got charts, which I should undoubtedly have had before, and the Sailing Directions. I looked up the island on which I had so unwillingly, landed. This was what our own Admiralty volume said about it—(latitude and longitude, and one or two other particulars, I omit) — "IOTA — . . . This island is the leper quarantine station for the Omega group. Serious penalties are attached to landing."

"Yes," I said, closing the book, "and I can add to that; getting a leper away from it—to Valparaiso or elsewhere—is five years on the breakwater. . . ."

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All this I remembered, point by point, as I walked, beneath the mangoes of Daru, three thousand miles away from Omega in distance; years in point of time.

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I remembered it clearly, without omission, as if it had happened yesterday. And most clearly of all do I remember—now—the face of the man who wore the yellow dress with the black spots big as plates. Undoubtedly, it was the face of Sir Richard Fanshawe. Everything came back to me—the height of the man, his thinness, his chestnut hair and yellow-brown eyes, the slim arched nose and neat chin, the lips, unusually red for a man's; the voice, peculiarly resounding and deep in tone; even the injured and deformed fingernail that I now remembered I had seen as Sir Richard came up the ship's accommodation ladder, sliding one hand along the guard-rope. I was as sure as I was of my own existence, that Pia's fiancé was the leper who had, that night, escaped from Iota island.

Not while I stayed in Omega—which was no longer than the call of the next boat—did anyone discover what had happened. The Power that owns Omega is quicker with punishment than prevention; it had determined to wipe out leprosy in the islands with a strong and unpitying hand, but it relied, seemingly, on fierce punishments, for infraction of quarantine rules, rather than on a system of guards and preventatives that we in their place, would certainly have set up. However, they raised enough dust about the matter when it was found out. Down in Auckland, I came upon a paper that related the daring escape from Iota of a "foreign speculator" named Fellows, who had been buying up certain commercial interests for his country, and who had, in the course of these affairs, deemed it necessary to take out papers transferring his nationality to the flag that waved over Omega. A luckless transfer! It placed him beneath

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the Omegan laws, and when a dramatic accident—the discovery of a seemingly harmless mark upon his body, when bathing—obliged him to go up to the local doctor for examination, he was sent without mercy to the quarantine island. There were those who hinted that Fellows' recently acquired commercial interests had something to do with the case; that a big company was behind the doctor. Be that how it might, Fellows was sentenced to Iota, and, but for the daring rescue, would probably have spent the rest of his days there. They could not have been many. Any mistakes that had ever been made in sending suspects to the leper island, were but too likely to rectify themselves.

Fellows had been nine weeks on Iota. Nine weeks on an islet inhabited by the terrible things I had seen; an islet reeking with contagion, and innocent of any modern sanitary precaution whatever.

He might or might not have had the germ with him when he went there; but nothing was more probable than that he had taken it away with him, in any case.

Leprosy, I knew, could lie dormant for many years; might when acquired, develop so slowly that the victim could live an ordinary life without being suspected, for a very long time. If Fellows was indeed Fanshawe—if he had gone to Omega to carry out a daring speculation in Omegan products, concealing his name, and altering his nationality—a course that sounded very like what one had known of him in the war—then, the most horrible peril that can be conceived hung over Pia, and there was no one but myself to get her out of it.

Myself—with a hundred odd pounds of capital, no position and no reputation, save the unlucky one

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of being in love with her. Myself, against a rich and famous man, high placed in society, and approved by Pia's family—no doubt approved by the girl. Time against me, place against me, everything against me, save one thing—the fact that Fanshawe was coming to New Guinea.

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CHAPTER IV

A SECRET SHARED

It was late, before I ended that restless tramp beneath the mango trees, and thought of returning to my store. The night had turned to rain, as it so often does in Daru; my torch, when I snapped it on to see the way, shone on a myriad of crystal rods, dancing all over the road. The frogs had begun their nightly chant—"Port, port, port! Starboard, starboard!" In the near distance, among the mangroves of the beach, an alligator belled, as they do on these wet steamy nights. The sound had in it the essence of all savagery and loneliness. It made me realise, vividly, that I in my way was as savage and lonesome a creature as that mailed dragon down in the swamp; that I and civilisation, cities, pleasures and amenities of life, had nought to do with one another. There was nothing apologetic in the thought; no sense of inferiority, which, I maintained, and still maintain, is not in the question. I have seen many a man who was a born sailor, in body, bearing, and mind, of the sea and the sea only, unfitted for cities or society. I have not heard that anyone thought the less of such men; wanted them to be that which they were not, and could not be; called them, contemptuously, rolling stones that bore no moss, or urged them to abandon sea life for a seat on somebody's office stool. Nor have I seen the

farmer type despised, for similar reasons. But we others, we adventurers who traverse trackless lands, instead of trackless waters; who look for the rough, the wild, in life, and are ready to pay for it when we find it; who discover the fields that others are to plough, the mines that others develop, the rivers that carry traffic for cunninger, smaller folk than ourselves—we are the bad lots; the relatives of whom smug families at home speak hopelessly, with shaken heads. We are the Ishmaels, the pariahs. . . .

Unless, by chance, we drop, almost against our wills, against all our typical luck, into that "something good" that is the summit and the sun of life—according to the wise folk of the cities. Then, everyone holds out the ready hand; then, a man's merits show clear as sun at noonday, though, before the lucky strike, he was but a crank and a dreamer. . . .

I don't murder facts. It is the truth that many of us drink. I, for one, do not; but I can point you half a hundred better men than I, in all parts of the tropic world, who cannot be trusted—long—in the neighbourhood of a whisky bottle; many more who cannot be trusted—in the presence of that still more dangerous intoxicant, a fair woman. What of it? They have their work to do, and they do it; work that, in many cases, would make the saints who condemn them turn pale, even to see. Imperfect tools we are, but with our blunt edges, and crooked handles, we are nevertheless carving out most of those slices of the world that still remain to be carved.

Between free-lances such as we, and commercial, ordinary folk, stands a class that is neither one nor the other—Government people. Not half enough has been written of the work done by Government men,

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in countries such as Papua. The "North West Mounted", exploited to sickness in "pictures", the cowboy of the western world, with his guns and his "bad men" are babies in experience and daring, compared to some of the R.M.'s, and patrol officers of the last, worst cannibal country in the world. . . .

A hundred times I had thought this. For the hundred and first time I thought it, that night, beneath the dripping mango trees, with the alligator lifting up its moaning bellow, down in the swamps below. And I said to myself, with sudden resolve—"I'll go to Bassett; tell him the affair, and see what he says."

They were not yet gone to bed, in the Residency. I could see them from the roadway, Bassett's grave, ministerial face (he was the son of a well-known parson, and looked it); Northanger's narrow countenance, that was like the face of a schoolmaster, until you caught something strangely hard at the back of the blue eyes; Purchase, hair ruffled like the feathers of a hen, and features, as always, on the verge of a laugh, seeming to take the world, and his share of it, which was assuredly a hard one, very merrily indeed. Spicer was not to be seen; I was glad of it, for island houses offer small privacy, and I had that to say which would not pass with Fanshawe's friend. 'The others were not talking, not playing cards, not doing anything in particular except smoking, and quietly absorbing their usual, moderate amount of drink. They looked, in their fresh white shirts and pipeclayed shoes, exceedingly clean, comfortable, and peaceful—enjoying for a few days, an oasis in the desert of hardships that made up their common lives.

Into the midst of this, I came, wet and bedraggled, and I make no doubt, looking like a last year's corpse. I could see the effect of my looks mirrored instantly in the faces about me; but nobody jumped up, or said—"My God, what's happened to you?" or "What's the row?" or any other silly thing, such as fellows elsewhere would certainly have thrown out at me. These fellows were not given to taking any circumstance in life other than quietly.

"Where's Spicer?" I asked of Bassett. It did not occur to me to offer any explanation of my return, when I was supposed to be abed with fever; nor did anybody ask for one.

"Sit down. He went back to Maidstone's; he's staying there."

"Maidstone ask him?" queried Purchase.

"Not much. Nor his Missus. He just came."

"They'll be too damned kind to him."

"Of course. They are. But I reckon Maidstone and she are about fed up with these wandering Christians who blow in from T.I. We'll do what we can to see they aren't worried any more." It was the Government speaking here.

"If you could have kept that bird from landing altogether——"

"Oh, be reasonable, Perk; he has business. He's going to see to the recruiting end down here."

"Chance for you, Sheep," suggested Purchase. Recruiting labour was part of my trade.

Bassett gave me a keen look, and said nothing. I saw that he guessed there was more than recruiting in the wind.

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Northanger got up. "I must be going?" he said. "The missus will be sending a patrol after me. Ready, Purchase?"

If there was a hint, Purchase took it. They were gone in another minute, and Bassett and I were left alone in the austere, shiny parlour, with the rain shouting on the iron roof, and the steady chorus of the frogs rising up from overflowing ditches outside. "Port, Port, Port," they chanted. "Sherry, sherry. Star-board, star-board, port, port!"

Bassett, in his precise way, became busy. He brought out a suit of clothes neater and better mended than anything I possessed, if somewhat cheaper in kind—and handed it to me.

"You haven't a dry thread on you," he observed. "Better shift." He went off into the kitchen, and I heard him stirring up a sleeping boy; heard the clink of a kettle lid, the jingling of glasses. Bassett came back, looked at me, as I sat, fresh clad, and made no remark. The boy followed almost immediately with hot punch, and a quinine bottle. I helped myself to a share of both. It did not occur to me to thank Bassett for saving me from an attack of blackwater; somehow, one had a habit of taking things from him as a matter of course. He was so dry about it himself. . . .

"I wanted to ask you something," I said.

"Yes," answered Bassett. It was a brief reply, but it carried a good deal; the tone, the look of Bassett's brown eyes, beneath his high ministerial-looking forehead, the settled attitude, hands crossed on knees, all suggested calm, reliability, and, what he must have known I desired above all things—as sick

men consulting doctors, sinful men consulting priests, desire it—the professional attitude.

I have always hated sympathy—sympathy, and pity, which I hold first-cousins to scorn. Help's another thing; but I ask you who read, if it commonly goes with what the world knows as a sympathetic character? "Be sure and let me know if I can do anything," is what you get from that; a cold crust handed out with courtly smiles. . . .

Bassett wasn't sympathetic. He just sat there, and waited to hear what I had to say. And I knew he would do anything that could be done.

I told him the whole thing. It was not easy to tell, because I had to bring Pia into it, and I found, to my intense disgust, that my voice got unsteady when I spoke of her. Bassett did not appear to notice that. He listened quite to the end, in his magistrate-on-the-bench manner, making no comment. When he thought I had quite done, he came out, surprisingly, with:

"You are very much in love with this girl." It was not a question, it was a statement, made much as one's physician might offer a comment on the condition of one's lungs or liver.

"Am I?" I said stupidly. Something, at that moment, impelled me to get up and tramp the little parlour, end to end, like a wild beast tramping its den. Something had hold of me—I hardly knew what it was, but it shook me. What was the matter? Had I not agreed with myself that the wind which was Pia Laurier had blown through my life and passed away? To save her from marriage with one incredibly vile—that was a duty: but a duty that devolved on me merely as a man; not as the man who loved her.

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I had been so certain that I should not, therefore did not, love the girl with the black shingle and blue eyes; the girl who, even if she were ten times free, was not for me, wanderer, rolling stone, black sheep.

Things cleared in my brain. I sat down again. The thought that had come to me was nothing brilliant, nothing new; it was only this—"If I am hurt, I am hurt; well, then, I've got to stick it." I found it steadying, comforting even. . . .

"It's not what you would call material to the evidence," I answered Bassett. "But you can take it so if you like."

"Very well. Do you know where her parents are?"

"Could find 'em, I suppose."

"The only thing to do is to tell them. Mind, they may not believe you. The story's thin, and I daresay they know you are gone on the girl yourself."

"The mother does, and she'd poison me if she could," was my reply. "What if the marriage is coming off immediately?"

"It couldn't," pointed out Bassett, "if he's going on this trip—but if you have any uneasiness on that point, you can go to Thursday Island and send a wireless."

"For all Australia to read!"

"Cross to Cape York and get the land line."

"I don't mind," said I thoughtfully, "if I do. You see—it may seem foolish, but I can't help fearing she might be attracted to the country. She's dead nuts on hearing about it."

"So many are," said the young magistrate, with a slightly weary air. Not much romance, I thought,

remained about the rivers and headhunters of Papua, for him.

"Don't forget, Black Sheep," went on Bassett (and I knew by the nickname, that he wanted to say much he would certainly leave unsaid; much kindness, much consolation for that which could not be helped or consoled). "Don't forget that there's such a thing as a law of libel; if you make mistakes, you may have to pay for them very dearly."

"I'll pay anything and everything," I said, rising. "I'll pay my life if I have to."

Bassett shook his sleek head, ever so little. "That's just the sort of thing——" he began, and stopped. "Amory," he went on, afresh. "You ought to be in the Government. I've said so before."

"You have," I answered him, "and I've told you that I—can't."

"They'd take you."

"Maybe. But I'm not made for the collar."

"The collar," said Bassett softly, "is a part of double harness."

I was silent for a moment; he had hit me. I thought of others; of Northanger, who, despite his school-master look, was at heart almost as much of a wild man as I. I saw, in fancy, that little home of Northanger's, not half a mile away—its daintiness, all in the midst of the western wilds; bright china, bright cretonnes, flowers, ferns, the thousand little nothings that make a home; the girl who lived there, and smilingly, bravely, wore her heart out in silence when Northanger was away playing the game of life and death in the unknown; the arms open to meet him when, thin, worn, ragged, he returned; the "desert made a paradise" by one. . . . I saw my

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store, my dangling cans and calicoes; my rough couch behind the counter, my table set with tins. The evenings—the endless hours from dark at half past six, till bed-time at nine. The nights, when sleep was but a name, and the frogs in the trenches, and the alligators in the swamp, boomed wicked choruses, telling one things not good to know. . . .

Just for a moment I saw, in long perspective, all that I paid, was like to pay, for the sweet-bitter bread of freedom. To be like Bassett (who had a girl and a hope somewhere, I knew), like Northanger, married, blessed; like Purchase, who was the mischief of a flirt, but sure to settle, some day—men with a salary, small, certain; with honourable duties; with a pension ahead some day, with the Empire as master, and under the Empire, that modern paladin, Sir Robert Markham, Lieutenant-Governor.

It would be well. It was well for these men, hard as were their lives. But—I was Amory, adventurer, black sheep; I could not, even if I would.

The subject dropped; was not picked up again.

"Thanks," I was saying to Bassett, who, I now saw, looked tired and a little worn; the hour was very late, and he had had a busy day. "Thanks. I'll do as you suggest. The sooner I can get to T.I.——"

There I stopped, halting, in the middle of my walk to the door. A sound had checked me.

"What was that?" I said to the R.M., in a low voice. The rain, for a little while, had slacked; the stillness, after the roar that had beaten on the roof all evening, was almost oppressive. A swamp pheasant, some way off, was pouring out bottle after bottle of imaginary water. "Bubble, bubble, bubble,"

went the sound. Then "Shish!" a half-choked sneeze.

It is the habit of the swamp pheasant to make these babbling and sneezing noises. But I had thought I heard a noise, just under my feet, that was no swamp pheasant; a sneeze—suppressed, yet audible—not coming from outside.

We stood, two figures turned to stone, and listened. I don't know what Bassett thought I had heard; maybe the beginning of a revolt among the man-eater and murderer prisoners, lightly confined in a wooden jail some few score yards away; maybe the movements of some half-crazed native, oppressed with the strange Vailala madness that has filled a few hurried graves, in Papua's West. The pheasant went on bubbling and sneezing; the frogs chanted. Somebody's pet hornbill, on the roof, began sliding noisily down the ridge to gutter; climbed up and did it again. . . .

"There's nobody," said Bassett.

I did not answer him. I made a sudden dart for the steps, down the steps, under the house, where eight' foot high piles made a little forest of darkness and secrecy, beneath the Residency floors. There was nobody there. But in the garden, the peering water-logged moon showed me a spray or two of the hibiscus hedge in sudden, agitated motion.

I jumped the hedge, and came down unexpectedly on something large and dusky, that heaved beneath my feet, and threw me off, as a bucking outlaw throws its rider; I fell, recovered myself, and saw, down the croton avenue, a man running away. He was tall and thin, and he ran in a flat-footed, heavy,

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plunking manner that instantly suggested to me two large flat feet I had seen earlier in the evening.

"Spicer!" I said to myself, and gave chase.

I am a good runner, but a stern chase is proverbially a long one, and the croton and mango avenues of Daru, on a darkish night, give excellent scope to the pursued. Moreover, it had begun to rain again, the paths were slippery, and the crash of falling water on drenched and downbeaten leaves, made noise enough to cover any retreat. Using my torch, I caught a glimpse of the fugitive, lost him, thought I saw him again, and finally pulled up on the beach road, near the trader Maidstone's, alone.

We aren't formal, in Western Papua. I went at once and knocked up Maidstone. It was sometime before he heard me, but he came forth at last, a thin, middle-aged man with a kindly, worthy face, peering, by the light of his hurricane lamp, out into the relentless rain. "Who's sick?" was his first query. "Who is it?"

"Amory," I answered. "Nobody sick. Is your boarder in?"

"He's not a boarder, we don't take boarders," was Maidstone's answer. "If you mean the nut who blew in to-day, he's in bed."

"Sure?"

Maidstone disappeared. "Well, now, it's a queer thing," he commented, coming back and standing, an odd, pyjama'd figure, on the soaked verandah boards, which reflected his bare feet like ice. "He's not there—Eh, what are you damning him for? What's he done?"

"I don't know what he *hasn't* done," I answered, furiously, for now I was almost sure that this Spicer, the creature of Fanshawe, had overheard every word I said to Bassett. "Break his neck when he comes in, or chuck him to the alligators; it's the best thing you can do with him."

"Well, now, the wife wouldn't like any rudeness," answered Maidstone, placidly. "I suppose he's got a right to go in the house, or out of the house, as he likes. You go back to your store, Phil Amory; you ought to be in bed. Good-night."

I did not go to bed. I went back to Bassett's. That long suffering official had not yet turned in; I could see him walking about the house with a lamp.

"Bassett," I said, bolting up the staircase. "That brute of a Spicer chap was underneath the house."

"You go to bed, Amory, and let other people go," he answered. "You're fanciful. I heard nothing but a swamp pheasant."

"I saw him, I tell you," was my angry response. "Running away among the mangoes. And Maidstone said he wasn't there."

"Tackle him yourself to-morrow morning," counselled Bassett. "Aren't you going to let anyone on the island go to sleep? Be off, Black Sheep, or I'll arrest you."

"I can tell you this," was my parting shot, "there's no power in Papua will get me to Thursday Island now."

Nevertheless, when morning came, I began to think differently.

I went to Maidstone's as early as possible. Spicer was lounging on the verandah, in Mrs. Maidstone's special chair, with a tin of Maidstone's special cigarettes

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at his elbow. Maidstone's boy was busy fetching him matches, soda water, another cushion for his head, a magazine to read. Mrs. Maidstone, in the background, was flying about, busy and energetic as usual. Slim, blue-eyed, pretty in a belated schoolgirl sort of fashion, this middle-aged woman of the outback was a constant wonder to me. She had seen and done almost all that the hardest cases in West Papua had seen and done—run risks, in earlier days, that made one's heart stand still to think of; nursed many a man through accident or fever; laid out and dressed for burial some of them. She had faced armed cannibals with a toy revolver; had more than once been shipwrecked; had starved and been thirsty, had suffered risk and loneliness in the little store when her husband was away, but bravely carried on his business for him, here and up the scarce-visited, terrible rivers of the mainland. She had shared her precious loaves of bread with any who needed—and let those who have lived long beyond reach of civilisation, tell what that may mean; how dearly our "daily bread" may be valued, when it is no longer daily, or sure. She had taken in houseless strangers, until the small profits of the store were eaten into almost beyond bearing. She had lived hard, and known no luxury, for years; faced danger like a man, and done a woman's work. Withal, she was the merriest thing in Western Papua, and, but for a line or two, and a grey hair or two, you might have given her five-and-twenty years. . . . I think we bachelors were all a little bit in love with Mary Maidstone. It did us no harm, and did her less than none. And I think Maidstone, in his own language, would have been somewhat "narked" if anyone had failed to appreciate her to the full.

Spicer, I reckoned, had been paying for his keep in the coin commonly used by such as he; flattery; "manner", such as well-bred folk are supposed to use (and happily do not) the mention, dazzling to Australians, of many titled people. I dared say that the Maidstones, though not liking him—they were too simple and honest for that—had been to some extent dazzled, hypnotised, by his well-worn and well practised airs.

I jumped straight into the heart of things, which habit is one of my most incurable faults. But what! life is short—I'd rather jump into now and then a hidden swamp, than spend days painfully walking round dusty roads. . . .

"Do you mind telling me," I said, "what you were doing under the R.M.'s house last night?"

I expected a plain denial, more or less angry. But Spicer was too clever for that.

"Oh, come now," he answered, with a man-of-the-world air, and something like a wink. "You can't expect me to give an account of my wanderings about this very fascinating island, after dark. No, Black Sheep, I can't let you baa-baa at me; leave that to the missionaries."

I could have knocked him off the verandah, with the utmost satisfaction; I am not sure that I shouldn't have done it, in spite of Mrs. Maidstone's presence, if something had not told me to move carefully, keep a lookout for red herrings trailed across the track.

"My name is Amory," I said. "What were you doing?"

He made as if to dig me in the ribs with a white, splayed forefinger; I think the look in my eyes made

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him draw it back, for never, without actually doing it, was I nearer to smashing in any man's face, in my life.

"Naughty, naughty," was what he said. "Ladies present."

Mrs. Maidstone—I don't know how—managed to melt away. She gave me a look of warning as she did so. Mary Maidstone, God bless her, and her kindly, shrewd old boy of a husband, seemed to go about Daru under the impression that I, Phil Amory, a reasonable chap enough, was actually the most dangerous of explosives.

I proceeded to prove that assumption false, by going on with my investigation.

"Really," I said, "I have my reasons, which I daresay"—(for I was beginning to think he hadn't heard anything)—"you know nothing about. I saw you, if not under the house, certainly close to the R.M.'s in the middle of last night, and when I chased you, you ran away."

"You bet I did," said Spicer with a giggle. "Thought you were the enraged husband, for a fiver."

"Bassett isn't married," I told him.

"The warder is," he sniggered. "Very pretty wife, too."

Now this bewildered me, for I did know Taluna, the wife of the native warder, and I had seen her, only a week before, brought up in court by her husband, in connection with a charge of "stealing" her, which he was making against another native. Taluna was no saint; and for a Papuan, she was unusually good-looking. It was also true that the warder's house was within a stone's throw of the place where I had tumbled over Spicer.

I didn't know what to think. Mrs. Maidstone came back at that moment, with a tray of glasses, interrupting—I fancied, deliberately—the conference. She offered us whisky; I took two fingers of it; Spicer took some more soda-water. It added to my dislike of him. I have always held that there's as likely as not to be something wrong about either a teetotaller or a non-smoker; if not wrong, half-baked. . . . Granted, that there are exceptions. Spicer I did not take to be an exception.

I knew that Bassett, who was shrewd enough, thought I had been wrong in supposing Spicer to be listening under the house. I knew, too, what he did not tell me—that a man who is overwrought, excited, and begins to fancy himself spied upon, may be in rather a bad way. Perhaps it was Mary Maidstone who gave the final stroke to my suspicions.

"Are you two done quarrelling?" she asked gaily, as I put away the tray that I had taken from her hands. (Spicer, for all his manners, had allowed her to serve him, sitting.) "And if you are, can I ask you, Phil, when you're going across again? I want you to do me an errand."

"Across," meant the trip of 120 miles, from this near point of Papua, to Australia.

"It depends," I answered her, "on Mr. Spicer."

"How, on me?" asked Spicer brusquely. If he did not say "my good man" his tone suggested that unpardonable form of address.

"I heard," I answered him evenly, "that you wanted a number of boys recruited. I have a good cutter and know the villages. I'd be glad to make you a price."

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("If he heard me," my thought ran, "if he knows that I'm off as fast as I can go to put a spoke in Fanshawe's wheel, he'll try and keep me here; nothing simpler.")

But Spicer, it seemed, did not want me to stay.

"There's no hurry," he said patronisingly. "Take your time. I shall stay here another three weeks." (I saw Mary Maidstone make a face of dismay, behind his back.) "I'm waiting for the *Papuan Chief* to bring the rest of the members of the Expedition along. Of course I am leader, next to Sir Richard, and I have all the organising in my hands. I shall have to see to the stores, with the help of our good friends the Maidstones. If you want to run across, don't mind me. Thursday Island—'Thirsty Island'—everyone knows it." He laughed rudely, and looked at my emptied glass.

Now, I am not a drinking man, if I do once in a way shift a glass before the sun's over the yard. I felt, one again, exceedingly inclined to pick a quarrel with this Spicer; once again, remembered that I could not afford to do so, if I wished to make sure of certain things.

"Very well," I said, watching his face. "I'll start across to-day—anchor at Cap, and get in early to-morrow. Mrs. Maidstone, if you've any commissions, I'll be delighted to attend to them."

"Right you are," answered my hostess cheerfully, with something of her gay schoolgirl manner coming back. "Just a sec, and I'll give you my list." She went off into the store, and Spicer, who had not altered by so much as a line the expression of his large, flat countenance took the cigarette out of his mouth to remark: "Good trip to you." It was a dismissal,

somewhat in the royal manner. I held myself in from answering him as I wished, and followed Mary Maidstone.

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Hotels in Thursday Island—of which there are a surprising number—are never the same, twice visited. Proprietors, managers and manageresses, vary almost as the seasons go. Nothing remains constant but the flat blue sea, blowing palms, red-dusty roads, outside the verandahs, goats grazing on paper, bottles and tins, about the steps; within, long passages through which the winds howl ceaselessly, rooms more or less fallen to ruin, strange relics, every here and there, of Thursday's long past pearling glories, in the shape of costly furniture marooned among packing-case rubbish, railings and banisters worth a little fortune, if any cared to buy; huge dark mirrors circled with the broken shards of crystalline Venice flowers. . . .

The Cosmopolis Grand, where I put up, looked much as usual; there were goats underneath it, goats on the steps, a bawling kid or two clatteringly woodenly over the verandah boards, while its mother, held off by a wire fence, answered it with screams. Within, there was a desolate big dining-room, with a pilot eating his lunch, slowly and contentiously, as pilots do, alone.

Nobody in the bar. Nobody on the dusk staircase. All gone out to a picnic probably, and the barman asleep. I found my usual room, and dumped my gear in it; walked round the echoing verandah, with a wary eye for ant-eaten boards; peeped into the pilot's room, and had about made up my mind that there

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was nobody here save myself and he, when I heard voices in the upstairs parlour. A man and a woman, talking.

"Gin-Sling, for a ducat," I said to myself. "Now what on earth?"

I did not mean to listen; but standing there in the dusk of the staircase, uncertain whether to go on or go back, I caught a sentence or two, before it became clear to me that, up or down, I must move on.

". . . Off that infernal ship. Of course you will, Jinny. You don't expect me to believe you missed the boat by accident?"

"Missed it for a lark."

"You didn't miss it for a lark—Genevieve. If you didn't miss it for me, you missed it for someone else."

Jinny's reply was tuneful, irrelevant, and chiefly concerned with the unluckily comic love adventures of a "coon in Alabam".

Then the other person, the man, said something that woke me up.

"Where," he asked, with a sudden rasp in his voice, "is the beachcomber fellow who picked you out of the sea?"

"At the bottom of it, for all I know," answered Gin-Sling, immediately abandoning her song for another.

"Yes, we have no beachcombers," she sang.

"We have no beachcombers to-day."

"Jinny, you're enough to——" That was all I heard. Conscious that I had already listened too long for decency, I hurried down the rubber carpeted

stairs, and out into the desolate back street behind the hotel. Under an immense old frangipanni, in a litter of dust and bones and papers and fallen flowers, I stood to light a cigarette, at the same time watching the door of the sitting-room, which was clearly visible from below. I wanted to see who would come out. I had half guessed already. . . .

Yes. It was Sir Richard Fanshawe's figure, thin and tall, that stalked out presently from the dusk doorway, followed by that other tall, thin figure that was Jinny. "They're like," I thought. "Ginger hair, brown eyes, same build, both of them, outlaw character, both. Not related physically, but mentally, they're cousins. Only I'll say this for her, that she is not, within streets, as bad as he."

From what I had heard, I guessed that Fanshawe had left the ship at some intermediate port, and that Jinny, at the same port, had accidentally, or purposely, abandoned her passage, and stayed behind.

She and Fanshawe had returned Australia-wards in the same ship; had disembarked at Thursday Island—I didn't quite see why, but that could pass—and were staying at the Cosmopolis Grand. Fanshawe, clearly, was making light love to her; she did not favour his suit, and he was inclined to blame me for the rebuff. Thought she was "gone" on me. Imagined (owing to the gossip he had no doubt heard on the ship) that she had abandoned her voyage and her contract, and headed back towards Papua—because of me. That was the situation, as I sized it up. Well, it might be flattering, but didn't see it as he did. Jinny I took to be the sort of person who might have a dozen reasons, or no reason, for anything she did.

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Perhaps I was one of the dozen reasons, perhaps not. In any case, it didn't greatly matter.

While I was pondering these things, no less a person than Sir Richard himself came down the steps of the hotel. He seemed to be in something of a hurry; he went quickly, without looking to right or left. I was clear in his way, but he scarcely brushed me with his glance, as he passed. In that instant, I realised, what indeed I might have known before, that to Pia's fiancé, I was nothing more than a name. I had seen him on the ship, but he had not—consciously—seen me. "Just as well," I thought, though I could not have told why.

The sight of him, busy and purposeful about I knew not what, reminded me that my telegram was still unsent. I went up to my room to concoct it; but I had scarcely got out pencil and paper, leaning over my suitcase with back to the door, when I was suddenly and not disagreeably blinded by two long cool hands that closed, without warning, over my eyes.

"Guess who," said Jinny's voice, with Jinny's own unmistakable chuckle in it.

"The prettiest girl in the Pacific," I answered, pulling down her hands, and twisting her face till it met mine. There seemed no reason—now—why I should not kiss this Jinny, and I did, with thoroughness. I had not wanted to kiss her on the boat, when the vision of Pia Laurier was still gilded with the light of not impossible future hopes. Now. . . . What did it matter?

Let Pia marry, or not marry, whom she listed; there was always the mangrove wall, and what it signified to stand between us two. . . .

Besides one couldn't forget that fellow in the corner room. I won't deny that his presence gave keen sauce to the kisses.

Jinny broke away from me; she was flushed, and laughing. I thought I had never seen her so pretty. I ran to fetch her a chair.

"Now come and tell me what it's all about?" I said. "Why aren't you delighting the smart folk of Singapore, and why isn't Sir Richard Fanshawe—well, why is he here, anyhow? I don't mean why is he with you? that's his luck—but what the deuce do the two of you want in this dead dustheap of a place?"

Jinny settled herself purringly in the hammock chair like a slim kitten that curls itself on a pillow. Her eyes were half closed; she looked beneath long lashes, heavy with paint, and across the plain, of scilla-blue sea and the far-out fairy isles of Tuesday and Wednesday. and the purple crags of Prince of Wales and Horn. I think, so looking, she saw none of these things, nor yet the sky with galloping trade-wind clouds, nor the near palm-tree tops, that almost blew across the rail beside us. I think that she saw only rough Phil Amory, called Black Sheep, and the day for her, ran filled with shining gold. ; . .

There's time and time for thinking, in the lands where black sheep live. Sometimes, since then, I have wondered how things might have gone; what my life, and that of another, might have been, had there been no Pia Laurier on the steamer. If there had been just Jinny Treacher, Jinny whom I had saved at the near risk of my own life; Jinny who gave me—I know—that which she never gave to anyone else.

I think I might have held her—God knows, who made us both. I think I might have looked into the

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faces of her children and never wondered . . . feared . . . I say I think. I do not know. There's the curse of the Jinny Treachers. About the one thing that matters, in the end, more than anything else—the children—you want to be sure. Sam Johnson put it brusquely, but well, when he said (I quote from memory): "Sir, a man wants to know that he is not leaving his property to the son of another."

Of course, I did not think all this while sitting beside Jinny in the shade and sun of blessed Thursday Island—blessed in its golden climate, if in nothing else. When you were with Jinny, you thought of her; she saw to that. She was a merry devil, and she made you merry, too. It was quite a little while before I found a chance to put my question to her again—somehow, nothing outside Thursday seemed as important as it had been, before those two long hands, like the "pale, pink-tipped" hands of the lady of Shalimar, closed over my eyes.

"What am I doing?" she answered lightly. "Missed me boat in Sourabaya, stuffin' rice-table at the Oranje. Fanshawe was there gorgin' himself, too; he was booked for Sourabaya—oil business of some kind—and he lent me my fare back to Sydney. There was a boat next day, and I thought I'd get away from him by taking it, but spare me days, that wasn't his idea; he saw his man and did his business and got away in twenty-four hours, along with me. And when I got off here, he got off, so that's that."

"He got off," I said, "because he's going across to Papua; he has one of his exploring trips on."

She nodded. "I know; he told me. He's heard something about it that he didn't like, this morning; he got fair snake-headed when his letters came along

in some little boat. I wouldn't have had a chance of this yarn with you, only that he went off for the telegraph office as soon as he'd read the letters. When he's here, he's all over the place like a pig in a fair."

I answered her nothing at all—silenced by a new and unpleasant thought. I had brought over a Government mail-bag in the cutter, as one usually did when crossing to "T.I." What was in it? Who from Daru had been writing to Sir Richard Fanshawe?

Spicer's cool indifference to my departure was easily comprehensible, if he had obtained, through that very circumstance, the chance of warning Sir Richard against myself and my ugly knowledge. It was no news to him, I dared say; he seemed to be Sir Richard's creature through and through.

Over these thoughts I sat glooming and worrying, till Jinny noticed the sudden drop in temperature, and began to tease. Then I roused myself. She must be in Fanshawe's confidence, more or less, I thought; it wouldn't do to set that keen mind of hers to work. I kissed her again, with no one but the goats to look on, and then jumped up and declared my intention of going out on business. What I meant to do was to sail my boat over to Cape York, and send my message—now more than ever necessary—by land line. The address of Pia Laurier's father was easily found; I knew where I could get a directory and year book of "Prominent Australians".

First, however, I went to the post-office, on the off chance of mail. I had to wait a little; somebody, inside, was busy telephoning a message to Cape York after the strange local fashion—words spelt out letter

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by letter, with a Christian name for each, to avoid blunders. Mechanically, as I leaned on the counter, I began taking up the message, which seemed public for all the world to hear:

“ . . . P for Peter, L for Laura, E for Emily, A for Alice, S for Samuel, E for Emily, D for Dora. . . . T for Thomas, O for Oliver. . . . H for Harry, A for Alice, V for Victoria, E for Emily. . . . ”

Somebody was “pleased to have” something, Waiting, I listened; I was really not conscious of eavesdropping; what was chiefly in my mind at the time was the bare possibility of a letter from Pia.

“Pleased to have you join,” the message slowly ran. “Prospector failed us. See letter March.” And then a word that waked me up like a shock from a live wire—“Re Tatata.”

The operator boggled at that; didn't think it right; tried again, and asked if it was a code word. Finally he spelt it out more or less under protest, as “T for Thomas, A for Alice, T for Terence, A for Ann, T for Timothy, A for Amelia, T for Teresa, A for Alfred.”

If I had had any scruples about listening (and really, one doesn't or oughtn't to listen), I had none now. “Tatata”—the word so clearly Papuan, to anyone who knew the country, the odd, distinctive word, not readily forgotten, was the keyword to the secret that I had, for almost a year, been cherishing; the secret that I had thought mine only.

Where, in the name of everything that was improbable, had Fanshawe got hold of that word, and the fact it connoted? Could a man keep nothing to himself, even though he locked his lips and reined in his very

thoughts? (I had been near telling the whole thing to Pia Laurier, but that did not seem to matter, since I had not really told; I was ready to credit myself with the virtue of reserve unflawed).

The message ended abruptly with "F"—sent over the wire by the patient operator as "F for Fanny." "Pretty near right," I commented to myself. "If I don't make a very bad guess. And now, what's next? I'd better think this out before I do anything."

The clerk came forward, and told me there were no letters. I hadn't expected any, so it was unreasonable for me to feel—as I did—exceedingly disappointed. I took myself and my disappointment out into the yellow sun and flying winds, walked down a wide main street that had nothing on it save myself, a Chinese storekeeper, a heap of rubbish, and half a herd of goats—it was a good place to think in peace—the middle of the main street of that town, at ten in the morning. Nothing to interfere with the calm flow of thought, unless one excepts the sudden passage, running wildly at nine miles an hour, of Thursday's sole taxi, a hybrid of the year nineteen-seven, occupied by the driver, one coloured man, and a calf. . . .

I came to the conclusion that my telegram had better go in any case and that after that, the sooner I set sail for Daru again, the sooner I got my gear together, and started off on my trip to the interior, the better. I hadn't money enough for all that was wanted—well, I would get Maidstone to "grub-stake" me, much though it went against my pride. I hadn't a mate to go with me; any man I could trust was sure to be in some un-get-at-able place. Well, I would

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take the risks of going alone with my boys. Anything, sooner than let Fanshawe (I stopped in the middle of the street to give him a good cursing) get ahead of me with what I fancied to be the biggest find ever made in Papua.

Now that I raked my mind through and through, now that I squeezed the last drop of every recollection that could help me, I was able to make a rough guess at the possible source of Fanshawe's information. And, like most mysteries, it turned out to be simple enough when explained. The fiancée of the dead miner had been, not a girl, but a widow. Her name, as I had heard it, was Brownrigg. Straining my memory, I seemed to recall something about her former name; and if I did not mistake, that name was the fairly common, but in this case, most significant one, of Fanshawe.

The miner perhaps had talked to Mrs. Brownrigg more than one had supposed. Mrs. Brownrigg perhaps had talked to her relative (if, indeed, he was in some distant way related to her) Sir Richard Fanshawe. I didn't see that I was ever likely to know the exact circumstances, and perhaps they did not matter. One thing did matter, and that was that a man who signed his telegrams "F", who was, almost certainly Fanshawe himself, was inviting some prospector to join an exploring party; using, in the message, the name of the point where Grace's trip, years ago, had ended.

If I had cursed Fanshawe before, I cursed myself now. Couldn't I have known that a find of the magnitude I suspected was not likely to remain secret, even if every man connected with the trip was dead, and I only in possession of the sole written record? Might

I not have guessed that what had happened in the case of Pia Laurier and myself, had also happened in the case of the miner and his girl? This young widow, for all I knew, might have been as fascinating to Grace as Pia was to me. It appeared that she had been; the more I thought of it all, the surer I was that Mrs. Brownrigg, before her death, had told somebody about Tatatata; and in order to do that, she must have got it out of Grace. Lord knows, it was sensational enough. . . .

Well then! what then! I knew what then. The chain of logic was too clear to miss. It looked as if fortune had delivered Richard Fanshawe into my hand; as if opportunity were there, ready and waiting, for very satisfying revenge. He was certainly fond of Genevieve Treacher, or he would not have taken the risk of spoiling his chances with Pia, by running off with "Gin-Sling". She, I made no doubt, could do anything with him that she chose. She would do anything—find out anything—if I lifted my finger . . . for me. . . .

I won't deny that I was tempted. I walked the streets of Thursday for quite a while—those weird streets, wide and empty, with blue sea winking at the end of every one, and an air about the sun-scarred, ant-eaten houses as if the inhabitants were all gone off on a boat picnic, but might be expected back again, any time almost. I wouldn't go back to the hotel—not, at least, until I had made up my mind. There is no odder.

Minds are queer things; they stand apart from the thing that is yourself; you argue, suffer defeat. . . . "Body, soul and spirit," not a bad definition, the old one, after all.

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Minds are illogical; they make small trouble about swallowing camels, then balk at something less than a sparrow. They give you free rein to a certain point, then, for no comprehensible reason, draw the sharpest of dividing lines, just there. I don't know why I, Phil Amory, black sheep, who had just been listening to a private telegram, and planning to act on knowledge thus discredibly acquired, should have decided, suddenly and irrevocably, that I would not do the thing I had been tempted to do, in the matter of Jinny and her lover.

"It's a dirty trick," I said to myself, and shook the thought away.

Jinny was not to be seen when I got back to the hotel. I could hear her, though, in one of her wild fits of merriment, amusing Fanshawe by what seemed to be a vivid imitation of two cats fighting two dogs, and an old lady screaming through it all. As Jinny did the thing, it was incredibly funny. You forgot that the cruel destruction of a lonely old granny's pets before her eyes, would not, in real life, be laughable, except to savages. Jinny could have staged a bull-fight or an execution for you, and you would have roared right through. I have seen her reduce a room to tears—not of melancholy—by impersonating, first the corpse, and then the parson, at a funeral.

I knew she would be looking for me, later on. I knew I should find her at my corner of the verandah, when the great moon of Torres began to sail like a golden galleon among the palm-tree tops, and the straits and islands were veiled in fairy blue. I knew what the magic of Thursday—for Thursday is magic, still, despite all ageing and decay—would do for me and for her. And I thought of that little head,

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with its close casque of shining hair, so very far away. And I took my gear from my room, and marched down to the beach below, where the cutter, out in green water, was swaying with the tides.

Night found me at Cape York, with my telegram ready to send.

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CHAPTER V

FIRST MOVES

I HAVE never had a harder task in my life, than the framing of that telegram. To say enough, and not too much—to influence Pia's unknown father, by a dozen words wired across a continent, so that he should exert himself to break, or postpone, his daughter's marriage—to show authority for what I counselled, and at the same time conceal the vivid personal interest that had prompted the sending of the message—this I found, in its entirety, more than I could manage. There was no doing the thing well; to do it somehow, anyhow, was all that I could expect.

This was what I produced, in the end, for the frankly interested clerks to despatch by land line from the Cape—no telephone transmission for me—

“Joseph Laurier,
Laurier Downs Station,
New South Wales.

“Serious reasons existing against Fanshawe marriage most strongly advise awaiting mail for necessary inquiries, cannot sufficiently emphasise necessity delay.”

And I signed my name, my insignificant, unknown name, in full—“Philip Cosgrove Amory”. Laurier

would not know Philip Cosgrove Amory from Adam, but that was perhaps something to the good—all things considered. He would be bound in common prudence to wait the arrival of my letter before giving judgment on the matter. I had done the best I could with the letter; it contained a plain statement of the occurrences on Iota Island, mentioned the fact of my acquaintance with Miss Laurier, and so concluded. No apologies—either the thing was unforgiveable, or it was a service beyond all thanks. No attempt to make capital, on my own account, of the circumstances that had brought me into communication with Pia's family. Just the facts, no more.

I sealed, registered and posted the letter, and put to sea again, with a lightened heart. So far as I knew, there was no reason for haste; but, nevertheless, instinct warned me that Fanshawe would try to hurry matters. Well, I had done the best I could, and given time, I could make sure that this unspeakable brute would never place a ring on Pia's finger. As to what might happen to myself, I made no guesses. Like so many men in a similar case, I thought I could be content not to have her, not to drag her down to my own hazardous level, if only I might be sure that no one else would take my place. I daresay it never even occurred to me that there were other men in the spacious world of the Lauriers, on whom Miss Laurier might be persuaded to smile—if I and Fanshawe were dead and buried to-morrow. I daresay I didn't think that Pia, with her beauty, her indescribable soft sweetness and charm, so intriguingly linked to the daring of a Britomarte, was not the girl to weep her life away under a willow; even if she wished that, simply, she wouldn't be let. I pictured her remaining an eternal

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maiden, never of course, developing into an old maid, for my sake, and was quite well pleased. If anyone had told me that Pia's hair, some time about 1940, would certainly be not only greyish, but thinnish; that in 1950, she would have lines running down from nose to chin, and a slightly mottled complexion; that in those days, her figure of a "Wingless Victory" would probably be thick about the waist, and her shoes a size larger than they were to-day—I think I should have struck him to earth for his blasphemy. So, also, I should have treated—or at all events, wished to treat anyone who suggested that Pia, like other girls, would want an establishment, might rather on the whole have a husband and a child or two, than not; prefer, maybe, a crooked stick in that line to none, if the man she was willing to marry, and the man she loved, but could not marry, both failed. . . .

Well, I sailed back to Thursday Island, very late, and all in the dark. And I suppose I was tired, after the long day and its many emotions. I had a theory that I never was tired; it seemed to me a disgraceful condition, fit only for dotards of forty, so I never allowed that it had touched, or could touch, myself. But the laws of Nature took no heed of my feelings, and that night, they had their revenge, I fell half asleep at the tiller, rammed the jetty, and was tumbled down into the hold, before my boy could catch me. He picked me up instantly, but the careless moment had done its work. I had a badly cut head and concussion of the brain; and it was my unlucky fate, in consequence, to spend the next few weeks in Thursday Island hospital.

I cannot tell how tiresome, maddening, I found the resultant confinement and delay; but I daresay the

hospital staff could have told, for I was a bad patient, always wanting steamer time tables and shipping reports, and studying them to the detriment of my temperature; always demanding to have the bandages taken on my head, and to be let go, always being told what the consequences would be, and disbelieving and damning the consequences. . . . It was worse towards the end of the third wretched week, for then, I had calculated a reply by letter might reach me, from Laurier Downs. None did, nor was there any telegram. The silence remained unbroken.

Afterwards I heard what had happened, and—as one always does—wondered why I couldn't have guessed it at the time. Nobody had died, as I frantically assumed. Nobody had treated me with silent contempt. Nothing had fallen into the hands of Fanshawe, or his "*âme damnée*"—Spicer—though I had guessed at all these solutions of the mystery. It was simply that Joseph Laurier was in England, not at home, and that my letter, marked "Private", and carefully sealed, had of course, been sent on after him, instead of being opened by his secretary. The telegram had also been posted on; over that, the secretary had used what he was pleased to call his judgment, and decided apparently, that he was less likely to risk losing his billet by sending my extraordinary and unconvincing wire under cover, than by hanging the Lauriers' dirty linen out over the cable lines of the world.

Hence, the silence, which made me realise, before long, that I might have done better to address both letter and wire to Mrs. Laurier. But there also, lions stood in the way. Would Mrs. Laurier believe anything I said on such a subject—I, a rather disreputable stranger,

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obviously jealous of the distinguished, wealthy party she had secured for her daughter? She might go so far as to lay my letter before Sir Richard. What would be the result? I didn't know, but I could guess that Sir Richard would make short work of it. Whether he knew, or did not know, himself to be unfit for all society save that of the wretches on Iota Island, he was clearly resolved to drive ahead. He could laugh me out of court—bring a hundred proofs, bought or manufactured, that he wasn't, couldn't be, the man I had seen. Was I sure myself? Bassett had not been at all sure, he had pointed out to me, among other things, that a damaged little finger nail could not be relied on, as my sort of serious proof, since nothing was more common than accidents to the little finger. "Look," he had said, holding up his own left little finger, "that's been pinched in a door; you can see the mark—and there's another fellow in the Division, that I can think of who has the same sort of mark; Garfield; he hit his with a mallet."

"Yes," I had told him, "but have you ever read the *Murder of Marie Roget*?"

"I have," answered Bassett, "and I see your point; the increasing value of each coincidence; still your coincidence don't quite satisfy me. . . ."

Was I not then sure? "By heaven, I am," I swore to myself, lying there on my hospital lounge, with the blue, island-jewelled seas of Thursday smiling at me beyond the verandah roof, maddening and desirable, unattainable too, as Pia Laurier herself. "Proof or no proof, I would swear it on my dying bed. . . ."

The nurse's white frock came speeding along my verandah.

"There's a lady to see you," she said, bringing up beside the lounge. "Matron says she may come. She's called to inquire before, but she wouldn't come in. She's asked to come in to-day."

I did not ask the lady's name; I thought I knew it. When Jinny Treacher, tall and thin, but graceful, like Trilby, in her very bones, appeared at the verandah's end, I knew my guess was right. More than that—I knew Sir Richard Fanshawe was gone.

During my imprisonment, my only consolation had been the fact that he was still close at hand. This I had taken pains to ascertain; to check up, day by day. I don't know what the hospital folk can have thought of my constant messages by telephone to the Cosmopolis Grand Hotel, where I had a good friend in the person of the half-caste porter; of the entire absence of any return inquiries from Sir Richard. I daresay they were accustomed to any sort of idiocy on the part of patients, and not very much interested in the idiocies of just one more.

But Jinny's presence, Jinny's visit, I knew, meant that she was, according to her own lights, free; that she could call on me with a clear conscience. She was, in her pale muslin dress, with her wonderful fluffy red hair peering under a black hat, the prettiest, most disturbing thing that could have entered the chaste wards of that hospital for many a day. Her very walk, the dancer's walk, seemed to scatter sunshine about her, her eyes, brown eyes with a candle lit behind them, shot merry signals, in passing, at the eyes of the men lying or lounging on the long verandah, and were answered, I could swear, by a spark from every one. I could have sworn, too, that

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everyone in sight envied me, when Jinny checked her floating walk beside my lounge, dropped into a chair, and crossing her yellow silk-stockinged knees with an air of entire comfort, asked me how I was. >

I told her, briefly and, I think, untruthfully. I was anxious to get to the reason for her call. That she had not come for the sole purpose of looking at Black Sheep, I knew as well as if she had told me. But it seemed hard for her to begin. She glanced at me sidewise over the big black fan she carried—one of Jinny's most potent weapons, that fan—chattered like a pretty, painted parrakeet, asked fifty questions about the nurses and the doctors and the conduct of the place generally, didn't wait for an answer to any one. At last, losing patience—I was not patient in those days—I asked her point-blank what she had come to tell me. Perhaps I sugared the question with the kind of compliments Jinny expected; I hope I did. At any rate, she became suddenly serious, furled her fan, and gave me a look that said, as plain as ever a look could say: "You are my master, and I obey your wish. . . ."

"Can anyone hear us?" she asked, half below breath.

"No," I answered her. "Look about you. Nobody nearer than that old chap at the end, and he's deaf."

"Well, then! He's off."

"I guessed that. What else?"

"You—you believe I'd help you, don't you?"

"Yes, Jinny, I'd believe anything kind of you."

"Don't believe too much; you might be sorry," she said, with more sharpness than the occasion seemed to demand. "But I—I'd help you to almost anything;

my oath, I would." She seemed to encourage herself; I wondered why.

"How soon'll you be ready to go?" she asked me.

"I'm practically ready now."

"He's off—to Port Moresby. By Cairns. He'll get his stores there, and he'll attend to some business—" She cleared her throat, made play with the fan again. "Business," she went on. "And get away immediately—to Tatatatata."

I knew it; I had been expecting it—but the word hit me like a stone. "Go on," I said, with some difficulty; my tongue seemed stiff.

"He wired for a prospector to join him, three weeks ago, and he's come. Tatatatata is——"

"I know all about it. I know," I said, getting angry, "a damn sight more than Fanshawe knows."

"He got it straight," she said, "from some woman who died; she had it from her bloke, who was killed and ate by the cannibals."

"No, that was his mate. How could he have got back to tell anyone?"

"I thought," said Jinny, and now she looked away from me, and the fan was working hard. "I thought, somehow, the woman was with the bloke who found it—on the expedition."

"On the expedition. Never, Jinny. That's one thing that a woman can't do yet, and hasn't done—go exploring in Papua."

"Can't she? Why?" asked Jinny. She was still looking away from me, the candle that burned ever behind her gold-brown eyes, was lighted to new brilliance by reflections from the dancing sea.

"Because," I answered her, "exploring, now-a-days, has been almost all done, the whole world over. There

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are only a very few doors still locked, Jinny, and you've got to ask yourself, why are they locked? The answer's plain. It isn't because nobody ever thought of opening them, or nobody every tried—which appears to be the notion of the damn fools who blow into Port Moresby every cool season, to walk across New Guinea—but it's because the only things left to find—and we've got most of them—are so tough that it takes the best men doing their best—more than their best—to get through."

"A woman can be as strong as a man," said Jinny, fanning away. "Look at those lady acrobats on the Halls."

"If you took those acrobats," I said, "and matched them—no allowance for sex, no mercy for being a woman—against just as many men acrobats, and made them compete till someone dropped where d'you think they'd be? Behind the men, every last one. Get out of your pretty head all that poppycock about women being as good as men, when it comes to real exploration—or anything that drives right down to the roots. Exploring means the last ounce that the strongest men can squeeze out of their bodies, driven to the last ditch. It means the male brute, all out. There's no use for women in a pinch like that."

I was not polite, I knew; but Jinny had hit me on a sensitive point. In New Guinea, the difference between real and sham exploration is a matter that interests all.

It seemed that she was not interested, however. She yawned a little, delicately, behind her fan; changed the subject, or rather, went back to the beginning.

"Sir Richard's off, anyhow," she remarked. "He won't be more than a week or two getting things together and starting. That's the name of the place what I told you. And whisper—I'll tell you what he's after——"

She leaned over to me; breathed into my ear a secret I had thought was known to no one but myself. "Now," she said, drawing back, and nodding wisely. "What do you think of little Jinny for telling you that?"

"I think you're very good indeed," I lied promptly. Dismay was the emotion that, in truth, had possession of me. I wondered how many people knew, or would know, and how soon they would be on the track of the unique, amazing place known as Tatatata. I swore to myself that, doctors or no doctors, I was off to-morrow.

Something of this I said. Gin-Sling eyed me with a satisfaction that I found almost puzzling. "Right; get off and beat him to it. That's the way, my lad; drink hearty, you'll soon be dead!" was her entirely Jinnean comment. "What way will you go?" she asked, presently.

"Way? oh, by Daru, I suppose."

She seemed to like that, and I realised, with some astonishment, that the map of Papua was no blank to her.

"Well," she said, "I must be going, or the cats will begin to mew. Call and say good-bye to me before you go. I'm out of a shop now, so I daresay I'll make back to little Sydney again. You've no idea what a lamb you look in those pink pyjamas, cuddly boy!" This for the benefit of the matron, who was bearing down upon us with intent to end the interview. "No

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good-bye," declared Jinny. "See you again soon." Her yellow stockings gleamed as she walked down the long verandah, just not dancing, out through the doorway into the smiting sun.

Next day I left the hospital. I called on Jinny, as a matter of course, and was rather surprised to find that she had sailed the previous night. The hotel people didn't seem to be sure what boat she had taken or where she had gone. And the truth was, that I had too much to do to puzzle over the matter for more than a little while. Nor did I, for even an instant, suspect what matters of grave import had lain concealed beneath the light surfaces of our talk.

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I had to go to Port Moresby, it turned out, because there was no one at Daru to take charge of my store, the man on whom I counted having suddenly left. I heard this by wireless, and decided on a flying trip to "Port", where I had other friends. I remember I was worried at having to go, but consoled myself by remembering that Sir Richard and his lot could not possibly get away before me, since they had still to do their recruiting, and mine was as good as done. I had only to whistle and get as many boys as I wanted, but they would have to employ a recruiter and probably overcome a good many difficulties before they collected boys enough to carry for a large party of strange white men. . . . As to Pia, she was safe in the East.

So, feeling like myself again at last, I sailed once more in the merry sun and wind, heading my cutter for Port Moresby. I remember that I sang as I cleared the harbour and smelt the open sea. . . .

First Moves

Never, since then, have I believed in presentiments, in warnings, or shadows that fall before events. There was no warning for me. Singing, I went straight to the dark day of my life; the day that has coloured, and will colour, every following hour, until that time when hours and days shall mean nothing more to me.

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CHAPTER VI

THE DARK DAY CLOSES

THAT which comes next must be told; but I shall not linger upon it.

I made Port Moresby on the evening of the third day. My boy was not with me; I had sent him back to Daru direct, and was alone. It was duskish when I sighted Paga Hill, with a nasty squall coming up. I was beaten out by the long solitary trip, so good after leaving hospital; I thought with disgust of the trouble of seeing the doctor, and the customs, and getting pratique, all to be gone through before I could have leave to land. Very likely they wouldn't give me pratique that evening; I should have to sleep on board the tiny cutter again, just when I needed a good rest.

The sight of Fisherman Island looming up to starboard decided me, I would run in there, spend the night at the empty quarantine station, and get off early next day for the port. Nobody would know—the island was uninhabited save by the old, crazy Solomon Island caretaker who had been there for over thirty years, and couldn't tell tales even if he would. Perhaps I was breaking quarantine laws—I didn't know, and did not much care. I knew that the two houses were comfortable, if one could get into them, and I reckoned I could manage that.

The Dark Day Closes

The wind was poor, dropping towards sunset; it took me a good while to run right up, and I had to land in half dark. I found the two little houses, standing up stark and pale against the velvet sky; I scrambled into one, and cautiously flashed my torch.

"Well!" was my astonished comment.

I had remembered the place as very bare—a rude table, a bench or two, nothing more. The houses had never yet been used for isolation purposes; picnic parties were allowed to go out there and stop the night; honeymoon couples, escaping from the too-persistent interest of the townspeople, camped sometimes; so did fishing expeditions—always with permission. I had none, but I did not intend to let that trouble me. It was eight miles from Port, and I could slip off at dawn without anyone being the wiser.

Somebody had certainly been preparing the place for a stay. There was a comfortable bed, a couple of planter chairs, a box that—I guessed—contained linen and oddments of various kinds. I peered into the cookhouse. Stores; cooking utensils. "They'll be coming along to-morrow," I thought; and reflected that I was luckier than I deserved.

It was very cool out there, I remember; far cooler than it would have been in little iron rooms beneath the stifling roofs of town. I had a bite of something from the locker of my boat, flung my bedding on the unknown person's bedstead, and slept magnificently. Once I woke, to hear the sea grumbling on the coral reef outside, and catch the sudden rattle of a squall. Sleepily I thought that I was lucky to be where I was; and so dozed off again. . . .

Dawn came with a wild crying of seabirds and a sudden wind that burst in the door. It waked me,

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and I slid to earth, looking for my shoes, for now it was full time I got away. I suppose I took a few seconds to slip on and tie the shoes; I never heard a sound—but when I looked up, there was someone in the doorway.

My first thought—for you could not see the man's face, so blackly was he silhouetted against the pale rose and primrose of the sky—was: "Caught; maybe it's the doctor inspecting". My second sent the blood from heart to fingertips, like leaping flame. I knew that tall, tight, well-set figure, that bearded head. I had seen it four times; once on the island of decay and death; once on the great liner in the Arafura Sea, once at the hotel on Thursday, and now here.

"Jinny lied," I thought, furiously. "She told me he was at the Daru end, recruiting. She did not want me to see him—to come to Port Moresby. . . . Why?"

There was no time to work that out. Fanshawe had seen me, he came across the floor in a couple of strides, and asked me, with profane additions, what on earth I might be doing there?

I could hardly answer him at first; never, till that moment, had it occurred to me that, however well he was known to me, I was, so far, quite unknown to him, except by repute. He might have seen me on the island, on the boat, at Thursday, but evidently he had not. On Iota, I was in the dark and he in the light; on the steamer, I was one of a crowd, and he the most distinguished person in it; in the Thursday hotel, I had just caught a glimpse of him, lying with his eyes shut. He did not know me.

I had little doubt that he knew of me, and I did not care to extend his knowledge—at all events,

not before I had had time to find out what he, for his part, was doing in Port Moresby. I answered him briefly.

"I did not know anyone had the place. I got in late, and camped."

"The —— you did," answered Fanshawe roughly. "Don't you know you have to get leave to land?"

"There was a squall coming."

"Squall be hanged. You'd better clear out of this, and be thankful if I don't report you." He stood there, waiting for me to go; big, masterful, steady, the very embodiment of power—power of position, of character, of money. In that minute, I began to understand—albeit dimly and reluctantly—why Pia Laurier had been willing to cast in her lot with him. It was the daring, race-riding, surf-shooting strain in her, typical young Georgian as she was, that had drawn her towards this successful soldier and speculator, Sir Richard Fanshawe.

I might have gone—knowing myself to be in the wrong, and not wishing to enlighten Fanshawe more than was necessary about myself—I might have gone, and changed the course of four lives that day—had not the merest trifle intervened. Nothing on earth but a cushion. Sir Richard had been carrying it, wrapped up in paper; while he was talking to me, he laid it down on a table, and the paper, being insufficiently fastened, burst open. I saw the thing, a pretty trifle of white satin and embroidered flowers, crying "Wedding Present" in every stitch and thread. I saw somebody's card fastened to it. And immediately I knew what it was; for whom it had been intended. And the world, for one reeling instant, vanished behind veils of red.

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I came out of that moment's madness calm and cold, as once or twice in the War I had found myself before the doing of some deed that brought a medal after it. Never, in those days, had I needed my nerve more than it was needed now.

"You are Sir Richard Fanshawe," I stated. He looked at me curiously; I thought he was beginning to guess.

"It may interest you to know," I went on, "that I am Philip Amory."

Now he turned scarlet; the curious, honey-coloured eyes flashed crescent moons of white above and below, like the eyes of a dangerous horse; and—like a horse again—his ears actually moved, as though he would have laid them back. There are men who have this power of moving the ears; it may be my luck that I have never seen it in any that one could trust.

"It seems," he said, restraining himself, "that I owe you a great deal of kindly interest in what I had supposed were my affairs."

I let the gibe pass. I let other things pass. The recent adventurings of Jinny offered a very large and very black crow to pick with a coming bridegroom, had I been so inclined. I was not. I had one thing only in my mind and, like a charging bull, I drove straight for it.

"Where is Miss Laurier?" I asked. I didn't expect him to answer, but he replied at once, coolly.

"About forty-five miles out at sea, on to-day's *Morinda*."

"She has come back to marry you?"

"Exactly."

"You're fixing up this place for her?"

The Dark Day Closes

He did not reply to that; he looked at me, watchfully, as one boxer eyes another in the ring.

"Well, I want to tell you," I said, "That you won't marry her—as long as I'm above ground."

Again he was silent; not from embarrassment—I doubt if any circumstance on earth could have embarrassed Richard Fanshawe—but because he chose to throw the weight of the moment upon me. Silence is a fine weapon, and a difficulty; Fanshawe knew how to use it.

Again I charged like a bull; but this time, it was as a bull charges, frantically and uselessly, upon the barrier about the ring.

"You were the man who got away from Iota Island. You're an escaped leper."

He just laughed a little; seemed to be waiting for me to have done. I had not anticipated this. I had all my arguments and answers ready; in my mind, the interview was to have run somewhat as follows:—

... "*But I never ought to have been there at all; it was a put-up job.*"

"*I don't care. I don't believe you anyhow; but if I did, you were months in that hell before you got away.*"

"*You've no proof. I can simply deny it.*"

"*I have enough, even without that damaged finger of yours. I'll hound you round the world; I'll go back to Omega and wake up the Government there. I'll make your life unliveable, unless you promise. . . .*"

Nothing of all this had been said. He was just standing there, not admitting, not denying. If I was strong, he, with his weight of added years and honours, his money, and his celebrity to back him up, was stronger. I could feel all that—as he meant that I should feel it—almost visibly upholding and supporting him, as we

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stood there in the windy quarantine house, with the seabirds crying on the sands outside; Fanshawe and I—"one and one, with a shadowy third"—the eternal triangle yet again.

It was my turn to be silent now. I was by no means done, but I did not, for the moment, see my way. "I'd give my life," I kept thinking, disconnectedly and fiercely. "I'd give my life!" But how could one give it? There was nothing to tell me—yet.

Fanshawe was entirely self possessed. He did not light the typical cigarette of the villain—possibly because he had none with him, possibly because his even, steady nerves required no such aid. He just waited till it seemed clear that I had done, and then spoke.

"Your boat is outside. You can get away as quick as you like."

"If I do," I warned him, "I'll sail straight to Port and stop your damned marriage."

"Just as you choose," he said. He took the white cushion out of its paper, smoothed it, laid it carefully on the back of one of the planter chairs; set down some small parcels he had in his pockets, and walked out of the house. He did not seem to be paying any attention at all to me.

For the first time in a pretty adventurous life, I felt out of my depth. I could not follow this man's thought. I could not make anything of him. What was coming next. I could not even imagine. Like a rising flood, like one of the nameless, terrifying forces felt in dreams, the cold strength of his character seemed to envelop me, and weigh me down.

One used to fight in the Great War, sometimes, when one was almost three parts asleep; drunk with

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the want of rest, long continued, with the never-relaxing strain. So I fought then, drunk, drugged by Fanshawe's enormous personality, his superior mental forces, yet determined, as ever one had been in the trenches, not to give in while life was life, and I was I.

We went down to the beach almost together. There was my cutter, rocking on the tide; there, long and black and slim, was what I knew to be the fastest thing afloat for a thousand miles—a speed launch capable of doing thirty miles an hour, which had laid for some good while in Port, unsaleable, because she simply ate fuel. . . . I thought I knew who had bought her, now; who didn't count a tin or two of benzine, when he happened to be in a hurry.

"It doesn't matter," I thought. "Eight miles is only eight miles, and I'll be there not much behind him." I picked up my little dinghy, slung it into the light green water, and pulled out. I was getting up anchor, when it occurred to me to look and see what Fanshawe might be about. What I saw puzzled me. He had got his engine going, but not thrown in the clutch. The launch was shaking from stem to stern with the fierce throbbings of her iron heart; her cable was stowed, and she was drifting a little with the tide, but no start had been made.

There seemed only one thing to do. The wind was freshening, the sun half-way above the sea. Every thin palm-tree of the hundreds dotted about the sandy barrenness of Fisherman Island was clapping hands to the rising breeze. I hoisted sail, and got under way.

When the wind had laid hands on jib and mainsail, and we were running fairly, I gave the sheet a turn round its cleat, and looked back. There was a great

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space of water, bright green inshore, bright blue outside, between myself and Sir Richard Fanshawe. But the launch, now under way, was beginning to eat up that space as it was said she ate up fuel. She lifted her bow clean out of water, threw walls of spume to right and left of her, and, at the apex of a long inverted V of wake, tore landward.

"Put on as much speed as you like," I thought, watching her. "I'll do it—with this wind—in forty minutes, and that's good enough." Nevertheless I could not feel quite easy; it seemed to me that Fanshawe was just the sort of man to keep a card up his sleeve.

"What card could he have?" I argued with myself, as the cutter heeled over, and foam began to gabble along her sides. "I can say enough—and I will—to put a dozen weddings off; and once put off—once let me have time——"

I stopped, seized the tiller, and snatched the boat over.

"Gosh," I said to myself, "is that your card, my man?" For he had turned the launch, and was heading her—thirty miles an hour—straight for me.

All I had heard of Sir Richard's daring as an airman, in the war, went racing through my head. His fierce attack—his famous stunts. . . . Truly he was stunting now. He might, probably would, cut my boat in two and spill me in a shark-haunted sea, seven and a half miles from the mainland. He might merely wreck himself in the attempt. Anyhow, he meant to try. That was Fanshawe. And, I swear, even as I saw him drive right down on me, I found time, somehow, to think, "God, Richard Fanshawe, if you weren't

the biggest villain unhung, what friends we two could have been!"

In the same moment, I had reached for the sporting rifle that lay loaded in its clip beside the deckhouse, flung it to my shoulder, and shot him dead.

He fell from the wheel of the launch, right down into black-blue water, sank and was gone.

The launch, released from control, went ahead furiously. I stayed a minute watching it; wondering whether it would get to the mainland without hitting anything, and what would be thought of its arrival, empty, if it did. I had little thought of myself, though I was vaguely aware that my own life might some day be forfeit, to pay for the life I had that minute spilled into the Pacific Ocean. It did not seem to matter very much. Nothing seemed to matter. I was conscious of a stupid coolness, a sensation as if the world and everything in it was done, gone—and I left floating, unreal, half alive, in a universe of shades.

In this mood I bouted ship and sailed back towards Fisherman. It was yet very early; the sun was up, but shadows were still violet, and lights raw gold. I cannot say how lovely, how solitary it was, out there miles from the mainland, with the gulls and sand-pipes running on the beaches and the thin palm-trees fluttering fathom-long fingers against a pale, innocent sky. I looked at it all as one looks through a window from outside. I had been one with this, and was not any longer. For now I understood that killing during the red years of war had been the same as this killing now I felt myself, for the first time in my days, blood guilty.

The man had tried to run me down. Yes—but I had not even attempted to escape, to manœuvre out

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of his way. I had shot him; not because he was trying to ram my cutter, but because he was on his way to marry Pia Laurier.

With that thought came strange relief; the chill stupidity cleared away from my brain. Had I not said I would give my life for her? Had I not done it potentially? If anyone ever came to know of the business of this morning I should hang, as sure as God made little apples. Good. Well and good. That seemed to wipe out the stain. I cannot explain; I can only say how I felt about it. I can only tell you that I steered the cutter, with a light enough heart, towards the back of the island, took a great sweep out to sea, and made for Port again by a round that, I calculated, would bring me into town towards afternoon.

Long light was falling on the kingfisher-coloured waters of the bay, when I at last sailed in among the anchored schooners, ketches, launches, whaleboats, and ran up my yellow flag. The clumsy bulk of the *Morinda* lay couched, like a whale, beside the wharf. Brown, furry-headed boys were running trucks about, with savage cries; winches were clattering. Hours ago the passengers must have disembarked, met their eager friends, and gone away home. Where was Richard Fanshawe's bride? What home had given her refuge, who was to have gone this day with that dead man on her honeymoon journey? -

The question was answered soon, and with it any dozen others that I might have wished to put. Scarcely had I passed customs and doctors and landed, before half my acquaintance—it seemed—were about me, vieing with one another for first chance to relate the event of the day. I must have been a god-send to them;

everyone else in town had, no doubt, discussed the affair to rags. . . .

Sir Richard Fanshawe had arrived by a local boat some days before. Sir Richard Fanshawe had hired Brackenridge's well-known speed launch, and kept running back and forwards to Fisherman Island, fitting up one of the quarantine houses with "every luxury you could imagine", in preparation for the wedding that was to take place before he and his party set off for the unknown. Sir Richard's bride was a countess in her own right, also an heiress and a beauty; she had run away from her people to marry him, and they were madly in love with each other. . . .

She was a governess from St. Kilda without a penny, and he hadn't wanted to go through with it. . . . Sir Richard had taken out the launch early that morning, and had never come back, and the launch had been sighted actually coming in from Fisherman on its own, till it ran aground on a shoal. When they got to it, there wasn't a soul on board, and no trace of the bridegroom but his gold cigar-case. The propeller was damaged and wobbly; that might have occurred either before or after the accident. Probably before—if so, you could see what had happened—Sir Richard hanging over the stern to watch the running of the propeller; hanging a bit too far, and—whiff!

On the whole everyone seemed to think it had been "Whiff". Fisherman and the surrounding sea had been fruitlessly searched, but the bridegroom had utterly vanished, and it had been necessary to call in the Anglican parson, that accredited ambassador of evil, to meet the unlucky bride and break the news.

Everybody told me all this altogether, with the chastened enjoyment that marks the relation of a real

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tragedy, none of your famines and floods and railway accidents in Siberia or Bengal, but something flavoury and exciting, happening close at hand. In the midst of the clamour I gathered my goods and escaped, thankful to have passed the barrier that I had unconsciously feared—the question I had been awaiting, with anxiety untold—"Did you see anything, hear anything, of an accident?"

For now, you see, I had realised that I could kill in Pia's service, as, in the red years, I had killed in England's and my own; but not for myself or for country or even for her, could I have lied. There is a good deal in the phrase "born liar". Lying has to be part of your self; it was not part of me. I had always thought I could lie like a trooper, if necessary; just as one thinks that one could make a success of thimble rigging, if one simply had to. . . . But neither the juggling of peas and thimbles, nor the juggling of facts, is as simple a matter as honest folks suppose.

I couldn't have convinced anyone with a denial of the facts I should have had to deny. But they had deceived themselves; assumed, without question in their eagerness to tell me all about it, that I could have nothing, on my part, to tell. I was much mistaken, if they wouldn't be repeating to each other, by and by, the very denials I had not made. . . . "There's Amory; he came along a few hours after, and never saw a thing. . . . Amory swears there wasn't a trace of him anywhere."

If I had doubted my safety, I did not doubt it now. From the wharf and the steamer, and the buzzing crowd of friends, enemies, acquaintances gathered thereabouts, I turned away. The evening light was orange on the red streets of Port Moresby, the dragonfly-

tinted sea darkening to indigo, as I climbed up the long, steep stony path that led to the house where Pia might be found.

Wilderness folk live much on omens, cherish symbols, perhaps inordinately. The path was an emblem to me; insomuch that I wondered anxiously if Pia would be there when I arrived, at the top of that long, hard climb. If she were out, gone, the omen would be bad. . . .

She was not out. The native in a Government tunic, who came to the steps, answered my inquiry with "Sinuabada she stop."

Would she see me? I scribbled my name on an envelope, and sent it in.

She would see me. The boy came back to say that "Sinuabada she talk you come."

It seemed too easy, too simple. I felt almost afraid. These months of dreaming—days and nights of barren desire, homesickness for the sound of her voice, the sight of her black little head—and beneath it all the echo, never resting, never ending, of all the seas, physical, social, spiritual, that flowed for ever between us—were these things nothing after all? Had I dreamed in truth? Had time flowed backward, and set me where I was on that blue sea morning, when Pia Laurier stooped like Dian to Endymion, and showed me love in maiden eyes?

No. This was Pia, slowly coming through the curtains at the end of the verandah and it was not the Pia of my dream.

Graver, older, changed, I saw her. I saw, too, that the change was not—as it well might have been—the work of the last few hours. Whatever had altered her was less recent than the tragic end of her bride-

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groom. She had, indeed, the look of one who has been half stunned by an unexpected blow, and scarcely yet recovered; but the grief, the wild despair of love parted from love in fulfilment's very hour—these were not hers.

There was no one on the verandah—I think, for the moment, no one in the house—save us two only. A long way below, the red-roofed town was darkening to night; in the dusk harbour, riding lights of ships winked one by one. Here, high on Paga Hill, day lingered yet; the rosy fingers of the bauhinia flowers trembled against the last rose of the sky; the stars of frangipanni showed, still pale, among the new pale stars of heaven. . . . So I met her, found her again, my rose, my star.

I had almost feared the meeting, been afraid of what I might feel in her presence; might, terribly, with shut lips, remember. I thought my love might have been clouded by the shadow of the day, as hers might have been dimmed by time.

I was to learn here, for the first time and the last—since it was for all time after—what love could mean and do. There was not, between us, the bar of any difference, distrust; the chill of any "variation or shadow of change". In the flower-scented semi-dusk we met, she who should, that day, have been the bride of another man, I who had the man's blood upon my hands, and it was as if the long months since we parted on the great liner, at Goode Island, had been a minute only, and as if nothing, no one, had ever come between.

There are moments, charged with forces beyond our telling, when the knowledge of whole years sweeps through us in one instant, leaving us for ever wiser,

changed. I knew then that nothing ever does come between love and love; not marriage, or life, or death; not anger, or crime; not faithlessness, if faithlessness were, because, with love behind that cloud, the sun would break again. God Himself cannot come between love and love, for God is love.

Nothing of all the explanations, all the talk, that should have been between us two, got itself said. For one moment we stood, filling our hungry eyes with one another, and I think I was, in that moment, as pale as she. Then our arms were round each other, and the honey of the greatest kiss in all the world was on my lips at last.

She was sitting on my knee by and by—I don't know where I had found a chair—and it was a bit later, and the stars were suddenly very bright among the swaying leaves of the bauhinias. And now we began to talk, but it was not the talk I had figured.

"What are you going to do till we are married?" was the first thing I remember asking her.

And she—"Oh, go home and make it up with dad and mother, I suppose".

I did not ask her what she had to make up. I was too busy swallowing a large lump of disappointment. Somehow I had thought—but that of course was impossible!—a girl with money (curse her money!) and I without even enough cash to buy stores for my trip. . . .

Well, if anything on earth was sure, it was that I should have enough to pay for everything I fancied, when I came back from that trip.

The more reason—if reason were wanted—for getting away at once. For leaving her. That hurt. I had another flash of insight just then; I saw ahead,

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and knew that love and pain were never long apart; sensed, as a seagull senses coming storm, the suffering I was to know through her.

She went on talking. She sat there on my knee as if it had been a chair, her arms supporting her round my neck; and yet I felt that for the moment she had withdrawn herself a little.

. . . "You see, they thought—at least mother did; dad wasn't there—that there was too much hurry about——" and now she faltered; her face turned, in the dusk, a little away from me—"About the marriage."

I did not answer.

"Richard cabled," she went on, clearing her voice a little, and beginning to play, unconsciously (but I was not unconscious of it) with the ends of my tie. "He said he was starting earlier than he had expected on his exploring trip through the unknown part of Papua. And he said one never knew one would come back. And he asked me to meet him here and marry him before he left."

I was still silent. Best to let her tell in her own way—but I knew it all beforehand.

"I telegraphed," she went on. "I said yes." She paused again. A mopoke, early awake, was beginning his nightly wail among the eucalyptus trees outside. "Hoo, hoo," he mourned. "Hoo, hoo, hoo!"

. . . "Mother didn't like it. She said he could put off his trip, come up to Singapore—we were staying at Government House—and do the thing decently. She almost forbid me to leave. But—well, Mother's pretty clever; she knows when to stop. She said at last that if I was bent on marrying someone, it was better Richard than—than——"

"I know."

"So she let me go. She couldn't come herself; my sister Anne had joined us, and Mother thought His Excellency was rather taken—he's a widower, you know And that made her determined to stop, if the heavens fell. . . . She's a very, very good mother, you know, quite the best sort they make, and I love her frightfully, but she *does*— Well!— So I came. And I—I—let me go."

I did not struggle to hold her, by so much as a finger or a fold of her dress. I knew that, for the moment, something other than love, of I, had her in its grip. Death. The thought of to-day; of the man who was to have held her in his arms; lying "tossed with tangle and with shells" at the bottom of the Coral Sea.

She stood by the verandah rails; I could just see her in the darkness, and hear, faintly, the sound of her subdued weeping. I was not jealous of those tears. I understood.

She came back as I had known she would, in a minute or two, and, shielded by the darkness, let me wipe the tears from her face.

"There, there, sweetheart," I found myself saying, as one consoles a crying child when its fit of tears is past. "Don't mind about him. He wasn't worth——"

"It's not that. It's because I'm not sorry—not really sorry. Almost glad. I never should have done it. I was mad to promise. But you—you——"

As clearly as if she had spoken them, I heard the words, "You left me".

"There was something," she said presently, taking my handkerchief out of my pocket and using it to wipe her eyes and (I can't help it) blow her darling

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nose—"There was something I didn't quite grasp about it all. I was in a hurry to get away from everything—and I thought—forgive me, will you?—I should love to see you at my wedding, and walk past you, and look up at him, as if you didn't exist. I didn't do much thinking. But I couldn't help feeling at times, as if someone had set me a sum to work, and I could work it—all but one figure. I hadn't that figure. I don't think I have it yet—but I don't care. If ever you know any more about the whole thing—Richard's trip, and the hurry he was in, and whatever else I mayn't have heard—I know you'll tell me."

"If ever I know anything more than I do know about it," I told her, "I will certainly tell you." And to myself I added, "God forbid your knowing half what I do, now or ever."

CHAPTER VII

THE ONE WHO FOLLOWED

FROM where I was camped, the whole world seemed to fall away in one huge wave, upon whose crest the boys and I precariously hung. Four days we had toiled to reach this place, four days of hardest work, cutting our road foot by foot through forest that was knitted and tangled together, first by the thorny "bush rope" that is the curse of much New Guinea travel, later by something that was even worse—trailing bamboo. We had gone soaked with heat night and day, the brown bodies of the carriers streaming, my own light singlet sticking to my back. We were pitted with leech bites, scarred by mosquitoes, and as we sat in camp, every man kept scratching almost ceaselessly at the painful lumps raised by that insect pest, scrub itch.

A grid of sticks beneath a single thickness of calico represented my bed and my shelter; I hadn't had enough dinner, and wasn't likely to, for months; comfort was a dream, and danger daily food.

And I was happy. Not in the excited, romantic fashion of the new-chum let loose for the first time in the bush; rather, in the way of one who has long thirsted for a draught of the home airs about his native town, and, after long travel, long difficulty, has won back to it at last. I wish I could find words to tell the completeness of that conviction; the

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certainty—based on no producible facts—that I was in my proper place and doing what I ought to do—here, four days inland from the mid-waters of the Romilly River, away from all the world, white men and all their works; here, on the spine of the Dreadnought Ranges verging—at last, at last!—on the unknown.

From to-day, I knew, the worst of the work began. I sat, after supper looking down the sweep of the forest wave, and counting what had been done, since I and my carriers left the coast, ten days before, and began creeping up the little known Romilly in canoes. The sun had but just disappeared; still, on the sea of forest, yellow lights lingered, those strange sunset lights, shading into orange and indescribable rare emerald, that the Papuan traveller knows; still, one could catch the blue-green glimmer of the Romilly, looking up now and then like an eye through the parted trees. Savouring the short and meagre smoke that was all I could allow myself, I scanned the world below, and decided that I had done well. Grace, the dead miner, hadn't left the Romilly till he came right to the head of the navigable part. I, acting on what was more a guess than a conviction, had branched off from the river half way up. Nobody knew just what lay a day or two beyond my present camp, but from what I could see and infer, I thought I might succeed in cutting off weeks of work, by going on just as I was going, and—probably—avoiding the terrible stretch of limestone country that had been the undoing of Grace and his party. Limestone is the terror of explorers in Western Papua; it means caves, holes, traps, pinnacles, razor edges, it means water that has all run away underground, and tracks undiscoverable

by the eyes of any white; it is, in fine, a curse. I thought I had lifted the curse, for this trip anyhow. I might go a longer way round than Grace had gone, but I was likely to get there sooner.

This heartened me, for I knew that with to-morrow, we—I and my twenty carriers—would strike something sterner even than the slow cutting and crashing and struggling that had been our lot for four days. To-morrow, the real climb began; the very pinch of the night-wind, blowing suddenly cold upon us, down from the tops of God-knows-where, told one that; the clearness and sparkle of the stars, the carpet of moss, inches thick, covering trees and fallen logs; the red blossomed begonias, the raspberries, large and sweet, that trailed about the edges of the bush—all signs of increasing altitude. I looked at my barometer last; its unimpassioned statements in blacks and whites, interested me less than the tongues of forest and of sky.

So, with the smell of cut leaves and fallen wood about me—and I know no sweeter perfume on earth—in the opening made by a gigantic trunk that falling, had crashed its way through the forest and cleared a camping space—I sat and smoked and felt myself at peace. And the sun went down upon my day.

I should have slept well that night. I did not. Once or twice every night it was my habit to go round the sentries, stir them up, if necessary, with a length of lawyer cane, and see that all was right; but in between these visits, I could, and usually did, sleep like the dead. To-night it was different. I lay wakeful on my grid of sticks, saw, through the open triangle of the tent-fly, the Cross swing round to the movement of the earth about the sun; heard, hour by hour, the

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night birds of the bush—the bird that whistles sadly, endlessly; the bird that moans, the bird that sneezes, the bird that cracks a whip, the bird that suddenly, awfully, crashes a death-cry in your very ears, and before you have time to wonder what soul has gone forth upon that terrible scream, repeats it, so that you know it is but a bird. . . . For all these sounds, the night was deadly still; they seemed but to emphasise the enormous silences and solitudes amidst which I, poor insignificant man-thing, lay.

"Sleep," I told myself. "You must sleep. Tomorrow's a hard day." But there seemed to be springs in my eyelids, holding them up; the muscles of my limbs were stiff and unrelaxed. I could not sleep. By the dying flicker of the fire I could see the carriers lying beneath their tent-flies, each man shrouded in his grey blanket, still as the sheeted corpse that he resembled. The very sight and sound of them, snoring there, made me feel less sleepy than ever.

"Someone," I said, going back to an old nursery phrase, dimly remembered—"someone is thinking me awake. . . ."

The picture of the night nursery in the old stone house among the pine-trees. . . . Moonlight on my tiny bed. Katy, my Irish nurse, in the day-nursery next day, complainingly sleepless. A housemaid talking to her. . . .

"Have you got an 'eadache, Katy? Shall I bring you anything?"

"I have not, then, Ann. I don't want anything, thank you. It's just that the sleep won't come to me. It would be to be somebody thinkin' me awake, maybe."

"Laws, Katy, what do you mean?"

"Just that I mane, Ann. Maybe somewan in the Oul' Country, that does be missin' me, and thinkin' that hard that it comes over to me, and kills the sleep on me. 'Thinkin' you awake,' we do be callin' it. Or it might be somewan that's angry with you, and can't leave go the thought iv their anger. Or annywan that's lyin' awake wit' the sinse of you strong in their mind. Time and agin, I've seen it. Give me a dhrink of water and go yer ways to yer own bed, girl; it's no sleep I'll see this side of dark. . . ."

Moonlight gliding away from the small white cot; a child's black head lying still on the pillow. . . . There was no one "thinking little Phil awake" that night; he slept.

To-night, twenty years after, Phil, for the first time, remembers. Phil, no longer little, no longer innocent, lies awake and wonders who, in what place, may be thinking hard of him; lying awake, with "the sense of him strong in their mind". Who—where? Visions of one and another flit across his brain. Fair women and dusky; buds, and roses blown; some who may have wept for Phil Amory, and some who doubtless laughed and turned to another lover. He tries hard to bring up the vision of that last and loveliest; but Pia will not come to his call. Whoever may be "thinking him awake", this lonely night, it is not she.

Towards morning, when I should have been waking, I dropped into confused, tired sleep. The first spears of sunrise woke me like a stab; it is not at sunrise, but before, that the explorer should leave his none-too-downy bed. With a curse at my own laziness, I swung my feet over the end of the stick platform, pulled on boots, and was dressed. The air of sunrise was like

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a draught of iced wine; far below the crest of our camp blue hammocks of mountain flung themselves out of rolling seas of pearl-coloured mist; tree-silhouettes against the light of dawn showed like dark seaweeds afloat in golden water. Already the carriers had their fire going; they sat round it, blanket-robed, watching the pot of rice cook over the flames. I looked at them, almost through them; felt, as one feels in such places, that they, the brown men of the country, made scarce a break in the glorious, the intoxicating sense of solitude that a white man knows, on the verge of untrodden lands. Again, the passion of the unknown possessed me. Again I felt, as I had felt before, that no treasure obtainable from such a journey could match, for a moment, with the treasure of the journey itself. Over that nearest ridge, a couple of days' march on, there was no man knew what; but when I topped the mountain, I should know. And I said, in my rashness—"This is good; I ask no more of life."

In the same moment, I turned, looked carelessly down the long cutting in the forest that we had made the day before, and saw a figure seated on a log.

The current of my blood seemed to stop, as the flow of the Romilly River stops, for an instant, when the Gulf bore comes sweeping in, and holds it back. Then, as the bore flies up the river, driving all before it, anger and sick dismay invaded my soul. There was something else too—gratified vanity, and a kind of angry love, perhaps, but they were drowned beneath the uprushing ride. I took ten steps to the place where Jinny Treacher was sitting, and I said to her, "God, Jinny, what made you do this?"

She looked up at me. I could see now, in the growing dawn-light, how her beauty was wrecked; how her eyes had sunk back into her head, and her copper hair lost its shine; how she had worn herself to a skeleton, and let her clothes fall into rags. There were sores on her arms and neck—leech bite sores, blue marks of mosquito bites, deep scratches made by lawyer thorn. Her shoes were bandaged on to her feet. Her hat was a tangle of torn straw. Never did dainty girl look less dainty, merry soul less gay than "Gin-Sling", sitting there at dawn in the midst of the Papuan forest.

Anger had possession of me, and yet—though I knew that she had practically wrecked my expedition—I could not choose but pity the bright thing, brittle as a butterfly, who had wagered her light self against the terrific powers of the unknown; who, before the threshold well was crossed, lay beaten. Nothing but the slow pace enforced on me by the cutting of a track had kept her with me so far. She must have known this; guessed that her only chance of life was to come forward and show herself, fling herself on my mercy, before it was too late. She had obtained a canoe (as I afterwards learned) from the village at the Romilly mouth, and persuaded a small crew to accompany her. Living and sleeping on board, making the most of the small stock of provisions she had with her until she landed at the place where I had debarked a few hours earlier. There they deserted, as carriers will, and she had had no food save what she could carry herself, no shelter save the forest, during the four days of my journey towards Dreadnought Range. Luckily for her, it was impossible to lose the way, even when she fell behind, since the track we were

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cutting made our course plain as a macadamised road. I think she went in constant terror; terror of natives, terror of wild beasts (not knowing that there was nothing to fear in that direction, save a pig or two), terror, well justified, of dangerous snakes, and at last—I fear—even terror of me; for she must have guessed, all too soon, that her plan of following me right through was madness, and that she would be forced into showing herself.

But I do not think she knew, even suspected, that her coming stamped the expedition into dust. She had heard accounts of exploration in other countries; believed, no doubt, a good many "travellers' tales" that were half fiction, formed her ideas largely from the typical "explorer" of that stage world that was, after all, her proper medium, the glass through which she viewed all things of life. Through the midst of these pleasing falsities, these spun-sugar delusions, the reality of outback Papua had crashed like a charging wild boar; Jinny, for the first time in her life, was outmatched, beggared, crushed, thrown. And even then, she did not understand.

She thought she had merely to placate me, use her woman's tricks, in order to find refuge in my party. She didn't doubt her ability—Jinny had not had much reason to doubt her chance of success, in this or any other contest where the weapons of her sex were pitted against man's determination.

But it was not man's determination that barred her, now. It was the immense, impersonal might of the untamed wilderness; of Papua. Papua who cared not a flick of a leaf, not a cricket's chirp, for the dying or living of her or a hundred like her. Papua the chimera, the dragon, who gulped men like flies, and

never knew they had gone. Against this, the finest men of the nineteenth century, the pick of the twentieth, had fought, struggled, and—most often—lost, paying the loss with their lives. Who was the little dancer, to break lance in such an army?

She did not know. She stood up, and came to me, with the red of sunrise on her red gold hair, smoothing her torn shirt, and pulling down her tattered breeches, calling to work the smile that had gained a drop of new sweetness from every man who fell victim to it, until now it was a very honey-flower, wherein the wandering, kissing bee might drown. She knew her work, this Jinny. She made me, in a minute, forget her rags, her stains, her battered weary look, and see her but as I had known her, months, weeks ago, on the liner and in Thursday Island. Yet, at the same time, I was angry, and sorry—for her and for myself.

"Jinny, Jinny," I said to her; and again "Jinny, Jinny!" It seemed as if I could find no other words. I remember thinking, foolishly, that the only appropriate address would be that of Sir Isaac Newton to his dog—"Diamond, Diamond, you little know the mischief you have done!"

But Jinny suffered under no such inhibitions. She was only too eager to talk.

"My oath, Phil," she declared, catching me by the loose folds of my shirt, as if she feared that, somehow, I might vanish—"My oath! I thought it was all in with me, I did, straight. Last night I couldn't catch up, and I slept stridelegs in a tree. I was that afraid to be on the ground, and there was things creepin' about above me, and I couldn't see a sign of your fire anywhere, same as I'd seen it other nights, and I fair gave myself up for dead. And so this morning, I

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started off just as soon as I could see me feet, and I said to meself, 'Jinny, my girl, if you don't find him quick, the robins or whatever-it-is will come and cover you with leaves to-day.' So I hurried and hurried, and when I come on you just like that, it took me queerly, and I had to sit down, because, of course, I was afraid that you'd be angry— Phil, you're not angry with little Jin, are you? Phil, I just had to come. You don't know how useful I can be—I can cook bonzer, and I don't eat hardly anything meself, and I'm afraid of nothing; give me a gun and see. . . . I'll wash your clothes and make your bed. What are you laughin' at? I'm glad I've made you laugh. Are you laughing at me? I don't mind. I don't mind anything, now I've found you, and I know I'm goin' with you."

"Jinny, my dear," I said—and I did not think my black-haired Dian herself would grudge the kiss that went with the words—"Jinny, I only laughed because one doesn't wash anything to speak of, on these trips, not even oneself—and if you look at my bed" (the carriers had taken down the flies, and were busy packing up) "you'll see it doesn't need much making. Tell me," I said—for I wanted to put off the bad moment as long as possible—"tell me, have you had any breakfast?"

"No, nor dinner last night," she said. "I hadn't anything left."

"Then you must breakfast at once." I called a carrier, spoke to him and set him to make tea and bring meat and biscuit. It hurt me to see how Jinny eyed the food, yet how sparingly she wished to eat of it.

"There's plenty," I said. "Take all you want."

"I know there isn't plenty," she said, nodding her head wisely. "I know all about this explorin' trick. You take all you can carry, and when it's done, you're done. Have you"—she spoke through a mouthful of biscuit—"have you made any depôts?"

"Any *what*?" I demanded, scarce believing my ears.

"Depôts," she repeated, with absurd pride—and yet it was pathetic, too. "I know all about them. You bury the food same as a dog buries his bone, and you come back for it again."

I did not think it worth while, there and then, to attempt explanation of the somewhat complicated system of depôts, or caches, by which, in certain kinds of country, an explorer ensures his safe return. I was more concerned in knowing where she had got her information; it had a second-hand crammed sound. But I did not ask her then. I reflected—and the thought fetched a sudden sigh—that there would be plenty of time—too much—for talking over everything, in the next few days.

She had eaten her meat and biscuits, urged on by me; she had thirstily finished her pannikin of tea, and hesitatingly consented to drink another. Life was creeping back into her tired face, and with it something that I knew my next few words must kill—hope.

"I thought you'd be angry," she said, setting the pannikin down upon the ground. I said nothing. I took her scarred, burned hand, and began smoothing it gently in mine. Angry? She little knew. The very rage of hell had been in my heart, when first I looked down the clearing, saw her sitting there, knew what it meant to me, and knew, in the same moment, that she could never, if she lived to be a hundred, understand what she had done. Under-

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stand? Could any woman understand that? Could any woman, if she did understand, bear without shrivelling up, the knowledge, so damning to her sex pride, of what the Unknown meant to me and to my like? Endure to know that not even the thrills she herself could offer were greater than the rare ecstasy of standing, first and alone, where none had trod before?

No. She could not understand. Jinny, and Diamond, were alike; they "little knew". . . . How could one be angry?

"Leave go of my hand," she said suddenly. "There's something you aren't telling me, Phil. What is it?"

"Jinny," I said, "there are a great many things you haven't told me, and I propose to know them before very long; but there's plenty of time for all that. Plenty of time," I repeated, "for anything either of us wants to tell the other, on the way."

"Yes," she said. "The way to the place they call Tatatatata."

"The way to the mouth of the river, I mean," said I.

The pannikin clinked as she hit it with her heel, jumping up. Over the verge of the near precipice it rolled, and tinkled away, lost for ever.

"Oy!" said a cannibal carrier, quite as if he had been a character in a Mayfair novel.

"You're goin' back again?" cried Jinny.

"We're going back."

"Because of me?"

"Because I find it necessary to go."

"Phil, I'd have drowned myself rather than—if I'd known. Phil—don't do it, old boy. Let's go on and chance it. I'm not afraid of anything. I'll go till I drop dead. Let me, Phil." She was almost crying;

she held my sleeve tightly, and shook me, in her eagerness.

"Jinny," I said. "We're up against hard facts. You'd drop dead, as you call it, before noon to-day. You——"

"I done well up to this, anyhow. I kept with you, Phil!"

"You kept with me because the work hadn't begun. If you had been an hour—five minutes—later in finding me, Jinny, the meat-ants would have been picking your bones to-morrow, maybe before you were dead. If you came on with us now, we might be able to help you along——"

"Yes?" Her eyes glowed with hope.

"For a day or so—carrying you in a litter where we could, and slinging you up precipices with bush-rope like a tied pig. . . . That, Jinny, would cut our day's work down by a third, maybe a half. We should get a little way, and turn back. I prefer to turn back now. Don't cry, Gin-Sling; you never cry, you know. What's that war-cry of yours—'Drink hearty, you'll soon be dead'? Let's hear it again," I clapped her on the back, assuming a gaiety I was very far from feeling.

One of the swift changes typical of her sad, merry kind, seized hold on her without warning. She flashed into sudden fury.

"For twopence," she said. "I'd kill him—swine!"

"Who's the swine?" I asked. But she looked at me sidewise, and made no reply. I saw she was shaking with rage.

"Go easy," I told her. "We're going to have a real picnic trip down the river—no hurry, everything pleasant. There's nothing to cry about and nothing

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to get in a paddy about. I'm going to talk to the carriers; take any rags you want out of my swag while I'm away."

I left her alone, sitting there a forlorn slim figure, in the new sun of the day that was to have begun my march to victory. Parrots, painted in unbelievable colours, were wide awake in the bush about us, screaming to one another. Two birds of paradise, a female and a male—one dusky plumaged, one "glorious with wrought gold", came suddenly volplaning down from some invisible height, and plunged into the forest like divers taking water. There were giant locusts, I remember, making a most egregious noise in an enormous fan-shaped tree, and bell-birds, tinkling away with their little silver hammers; and down below the ridge, swamp pheasants pouring innumerable bottles of bubbly water; and something **unseen** that sang a delightful little four-bar tune. All the great bush was awake and getting to its business of the day—it didn't care that my ambitions were wrecked and my plans, of years, thrown into the Romilly River.

There was a river, I did not doubt, somewhere ahead, that would have borne my name. There was a range, untrod by white man's foot, that I had meant to call the "Pia Laurier." Now——

If it had been a man who followed me, I think I should have given him what stores I could spare—which would have been little—turned him round, and told him to make his way back as he had come. But a woman—Jinny—in the midst of wild, unknown country, with hostile natives never far away, and a hundred minor perils threatening every step—to say nothing of that last, worst peril of all, the danger of getting lost. . . .

I had never questioned for an instant the necessity laid upon me to take her safely back to civilisation; save her from the consequences of her folly, at any cost. But I could not pretend to myself—however much I might pretend to her—that I was glad. It meant the using up of my stores, the going back to Daru to refit. There was one stray trading station a little nearer, but it certainly would not trust a penniless man; and I should have to loot my own store, in order to get enough. These things were unavoidable. Losing the carriers was possible; they might desert as soon as they saw the sea, and I should have to recruit over again. Weeks of delay, months maybe, and all the time——

All the time——!

A thought struck me, hard. I was repacking some of the boys' loads, when the idea came to me, and made me pause, with a tin of meat in one hand and a packet of trade beads in another.

For a moment I lost my head; I seized the packet and the tin, and hurled them, as the nearest things on which I could vent my rage, down into the gorge below.

"Oy!" cried a carrier, as he saw the precious food disappear.

The bead-packet struck a thorn, burst open, and hung there raining drops of scarlet, white and blue, down into empty air.

I stared at it as if it had held the solution of some long puzzled over secret.

"All the time——" I said to myself. "All the time—somebody else would be getting away. . . . I think I can agree with Jinny in calling him a swine."

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I found her waiting by the baggage. She had taken a shirt and a pair of trousers out of my swag and dressed herself in them, throwing away her rags. She had smoothed her hair with my comb, and washed her face with what I inferred to be the last of our drinking water. . . . No matter; I could send a boy or two to fetch more from the bottom of the gorge; what was time, now? I suppose I shall not be believed when I say that she had powdered, and used lipstick; but it is a fact that neither the jungle nor the near approach of death from hunger and exposure, had availed to separate Jinny from her make-up.

The queerest mixture of kindliness and anger filled my heart, when I looked at her. After all, if what I suspected was true, she was scarce to blame. After all, she had risked her life, was ready to go on risking it, just for the doubtful blessing of my society. Was it a crime? No, by all the gods—no matter what it had cost me. Yet——

The high hill crest to which I had won looked brighter than ever; the tunnel of foliage we had cut, through which we must now return, darker than I had thought. Silently, I motioned the boys to go ahead of me; silently took place by Jinny, and began the backward march. I remember, as we went, that the whole of that high, happy place suddenly filled up with myriads of blue butterflies, sprung apparently from nowhere and going nowhere; butterflies that whirled and danced in the sun, making miracles of light and iridescence with their thousand wings. The sight was not new to me; I had seen it before, in Papuan travel—but it seemed to bear a special significance to-day; it seemed like luck, and happiness,

The One Who Followed

and the unnamed lure and wonder of the wild bush, all left behind. . . .

The way to the Romilly River was easier than it had been coming up. We got there in two days and camped to make rafts, since no canoes were now available. And on the first of the nights of our camp, Jinny and I came to an explanation.

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CHAPTER VIII

HEART OF FLAME

WE were seated cross-legged upon the platform of Jinny's tent-fly, which had been mine (I slept with the carriers now). A hurricane lamp, slung from the ridge pole, made an orange transparency of the little canvas shelter. Outside it was quite dark, save for the carriers' fires; you could not even see the Romilly River, though its course was curiously buoyed out in air by the hovering green lights of myriads of fire-flies. The smell of the forest was all about us, that stabbing, sweet wild odour, with a nameless intoxicant in the heart of it, that no one has ever been able to define or name. The dark pressed upon us with a feeling different from that of other dark—it was as if one had slipped, somehow, outside the kindly earth, and found oneself alone in the terrible gulfs of blackness that lie beyond the stars.

I don't know whether Jinny felt it. She sat with her legs crossed, playing on an imaginary banjo, and mimicking the sound with closed lips, very cleverly—if one had felt disposed for such cleverness. I was not so disposed, feeling, indeed, a good deal more like going down to the Romilly and drowning myself in it, than listening to revue tricks—but I respected the pluck that set that imaginary banjo twanging.

“Jinny the light-heeled and light-hearted; Jinny
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,”

had her standards, and acted up to them. And assuredly, one of the rules by which she guided the frail, fair craft of her life was, "Never let your man grow dull in your company."

Somehow she influenced me, drove the dark mood away. Somehow, by and by, she had me laughing. And the great dark about us pressed less heavily; the world narrowed, suddenly, to a cosy small tent with a lantern and a pretty girl lighting it up almost equally. . . . We had had little talk on the way down from the hills. I had pressed the pace to what I thought Jinny could stand, hustled the carriers along in front of us, helped Jinny where she wanted helping, but spoken scarce at all. I had one of those fits of silence on me that take the men of the wilderness, now and then, and I had seen no sufficient reason for trying to combat it.

But now, with a day or two of waiting before us, while rafts were made, with the still river beside us, unseen, unheard, yet felt, as a river is always felt, calming, soothing—with the scent of night about us, and pretty, unlucky Jinny, trying to make the best of everything, I felt strangely quieted. It seemed to me that I owed her something. She thought me hard, unkind. She had as much as said so, only that day: "You look soft, Black Sheep," she had said, "I reckon it's that black satin hair of yours, and your eyes—they're black and soft—but you're not soft; my oath! Sometimes I think you'd clink if I hit you."

Perhaps the memory of this came up in my mind. I didn't want to be a churl.

"What's it about, Jinny?" I asked her, as she ended her play. "What's the smoozing for?"

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Want me to go out and buy you a pair of silk stockings?"

She laughed; stretched out her shapely dancer's leg, disguised in my khaki trousers.

"I don't want anything off you," she said, suddenly grave. "At least, not anything you'd want to give me this side of the grave. . . . I've made up my mind to tell you all about everything—all about my comin' along after you, I mean—only I can't tell it when you keep lookin' at me that hard and cold as you do."

Again I reproached myself—Jinny was always making me reproach myself.

"Tell me anything you like, my dear," I said, "and I'll listen, and I'll look at you just any way you like."

"Ah—will you?" said she, with a strange tone in her voice. "I don't think!" Then, suddenly changing to a brighter, light note—"Well, the beginning of it was that day when you talked to me on Thursday Island, and said no woman couldn't go exploring; that put me in a bit of a paddy, because of course, I didn't believe it and I don't either——"

"We'll let that go," I cut in, a trifle wearily. I knew I should never succeed in making Jinny see the truth. Pride of sex, so strong in this pretty thing who was little else but sex, would for ever blind her eyes to certain hard truths concerning the muscular superiority, in the last resort, of men.

"Well, I was feeling pretty bad about it after you went. And it just came into my head, I dono how, that I'd get a boat and run over to the other side, and see, like, how things were going on with you and your trip. Of course, Sir Richard Fanshawe, he was

meanin' to go and get whatever it was, before you, and Spicer, he was backing him up; I'd got that much out of the old boy, while he was friends, because of course, he wanted to make love to me, and I wouldn't, and that's when they will tell you. . . . And then I found that you weren't there at all, at Da—what was the place?"

"Daru."

"Yes. Seems you'd gone to Port Moresby after all . . . Phil, wasn't that fair awful about Sir Richard gettin' drowned? Did no one ever find out anything. . . . Well, you know," and she ran on, without waiting for an answer, "when I heard you'd gone there, I was—I was—Phil, I was headed, snake-headed, I could've bit you. I'm tellin' you all the truth, Phil—I didn't want you to go, because I knew she would be there, and I thought, let her get safe married to Sir Richard, and it'll be all right, because she's the milk and water kind that won't ever think of another man again; that's what I thought. So when I heard you'd gone there—and he was dead—Are you going to marry her?"

It burst forth like a cry. If I had been angry with her for her slighting words about Pia, I was not angered now.

"Jinny, my dear child—who do you think would have me for their daughter? I'm as likely to marry Miss Laurier as you are to marry one of the King's sons," I answered her.

She went straight to the heart of that sophistry.

"Yes, but if you was to find something up at Tatatata, that was worth fortunes and millions——"

"I am quite sure, if I had a million to-morrow, Mrs. Laurier would not like me any the better." (Yes, but I

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thought to myself, she would let me marry her daughter; she hates the type I represent—all wise women hate it; it's anti-social—still, if I were a Bolshevik from Leningrad, with a million in my pocket, she'd swallow her hatred, hand over the girl—Curse her, and all like her!")

This went through my mind in a second, while Jinny was going on—

"I hadn't anywhere to stay at Daru. J——, what a place! all mud and mangroves—I'd go off me blooming nut, if I had to live there. Well, there was nowhere to stop, so that Mrs. Maidstone, she give me a bed; she's pi, but she isn't a wowser; I can put up with Mrs. Maidstone and old Bob. Where was I? Oh, Spicer, he was there too. I know Spicer; he used to be on the halls, years ago, but he wasn't any good at that, so he got a job as gentleman's gentleman to Sir Richard. Well, he and I clicked pretty well; I haven't no respect for Spicer, but he can be as pleasant as the next to talk to—pleasanter than some that. . . . Well. Spicer, he said to me: 'Why don't you up and after him, when he starts? He'll be back here to get his boys which is waiting for him,' says he, 'and then he'll be off by the Romilly River, and if you rake a canoe along the coast,' says he, 'I'll put you up to all the tricks,' he says, 'and you'll catch him up before he can get out of the bush country, where he'll have to cut his way,' he says, 'and you'll show him,' he says—'what you can do after all. And who knows,' he says——"

She came to a sudden stop. "I'm tired talkin'," she snapped. "I could do with a drink."

I fetched her water from the river. She drank it, and scolded me in the same breath. With an oath,

carelessly, almost offencelessly used, as was her fashion, she reproached me for rashness.

"Are you altogether mad, Phil Amory," she cried, "dippin' water out of one of these rivers at night? I may be a new chum, but I know that much; you might as well dip it out of the cage of the lions in the Zoo, with those alligators—Hear him!"

In effect, a bull alligator, challenging his kind, at that moment, lifted up his voice in a whining bellow that shook the very poles on which we sat.

"You wanted a drink," I told her.

"That's how you—what you——" She held the pannikin in her hand. She seemed to struggle with something unexpressed. "You—you'd do that," she went on, "and you wouldn't——" The rim of the pannikin hid her face, her lips that seemed to be trembling. She was a long time finishing the water, when she had done she handed me the empty tin, and said, looking away, "Isn't there a story about a king or some feller whom—whose chaps fetched him a drink from the well when the enemy was firin' something awful on it, and when it came, he wouldn't have it, he poured it out, because it had risked the lives of brave men—so the beggar said?"

"Someone in the Bible," I ventured.

"Ah—I used to read it; Sunday School, you know, and teachers what used to give you pink and gold cards. . . . I fought a little girl for hers, I remember, because I couldn't get none of my own; I bit her. . . . She give them up but she says, says she, 'You're a 'neathen, Jinny Treacher, and you'll come to a bad

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end—and the bogies will come and carry you off some day.'” She burst out laughing. “Well, I didn’t throw the drink away,” she said, irrelevantly. “Now I’ve told you everything, Phil Amory, and more than you want to know, so if you’ll kindly leave my little wooden hut to me, I’ll go bye-bye.”

“*You’ll leave my little wooden hut for me,*” she parodied shrilly. The black forest about us sounded to her high singing.

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I had thanked her, and left her, and I was alone—alone with myself, and the knowledge of my wrecked ambitions. Things, on the whole, looked worse than I had supposed them to be. Jinny did not know everything. So far as she was aware, Spicer had been the moving spirit in the plot to stop me and bring me back; but I guessed the hand of Sir Richard Fanshawe in the matter. Now Spicer was weak, I judged, but Fanshawe had been foresighted, efficient; if the plan were his, it was a good plan, fully organised, and one might expect developments from it yet. It was as certain as anything could reasonably be, that a rival expedition was even now on its way. One hope only I had. My road was not the road of the dead miner, Grace; I had used my knowledge of the country, and a certain bushman’s instinct that had often done me good service, to beat out a new track. If I were right—and I was all but sure of that—the new way would cut down risk, time, expense, above all, enable me to get to Tatatata faster than anyone else could. Faster, it might be, than any rival trip that had started already; I wouldn’t give up all hope of that, even now.

Under the hanging hurricane lamp that, in the bush, has shone upon so much weariness, so much despair and fear and triumph and hopeless pluck, I drew forth, once again, my copy of Grace's last notes, written on the day when famine and sickness drove him to turn back with his task still undone. Grace was leading an exploring trip, financed by a moneyed partner who wished to solve one of the many unsolved problems of the New Guinea back country, and, incidentally, place his somewhat undistinguished name upon the map. To cross from the Romilly to the Fly had been his ambition. There was—and still is—a big unknown area in those parts, and Jackson had been bitten by the desire, most natural, as I saw it—of finding out what, and who, might be in the untravelled space.

Grace had, no doubt, been moved by considerations of a more practical kind. There is always the possibility of running upon some valuable mineral, in these unknown places; death may wait round any corner, but so again may fortune, and the miner of Papua is always ready to risk one, for the hope of the other. I had never met any of these people—Grace, or Jackson, or the widowed girl whom Grace had loved and hoped to marry—but I thought I could reconstruct the whole business; sympathise, even, with these shades in a land of shadows, who, but a year or two ago, had been living, loving and struggling people, like Jinny, like me, like Pia Laurier.

And here were the three of us, and one or two more, entangled in the very lure that had brought those others to death. . . . Did the ghosts of dead men ever haunt the places where their loves and interests had lain, on earth? If so, I thought, the ghost of Grace could

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not be far away from me that night, as I sat on the end of the sleeping platform, under the lamp, and pored upon my copy of the words he had written in the bitterest hour of his life. . . .

"January 5th—No sago in sight. Stores very low. Jackson anxious to turn back at once. After dispute, agreed one day more. Ridge in front should give wide view when climbed. Boys weak, rebellious. Dysentery threatening. Two arrows shot into camp last night after dark, no one hit. Seen no natives for eight days."

"January 6th. To-day at four we turned back, having topped the ridge, which I have named Grace Hill. Height above sea level 4,350 feet. From top of hill most remarkable sight. Whole country for range of many miles all sinks down to one centre like water flowing out of a basin when plug is lifted. Not volcanic. Cannot say what, Jackson cannot say, suggests some sort of subsidence. Distance unusually clear, with glasses could make out dark spot in middle of this huge basin, like hole. Urged Jackson attempt further travel, but he declares himself unfit, insists immediate return. One carrier died to-day. Three in very poor condition. Natives appeared on distant ridge, war-danced. On return march found effigies human figures, with faces whitened by lime, laid across path and speared through heart. No attack. Camped on small unmapped river where we camped night of fifth. Deeply regret necessity return." . . . Then the passage that gave significance to the whole—added hastily in pencil, as if some reserve, some impulse of prudence had suddenly broken down—"Whole formation suggests gold. If so, have struck biggest jeweller's shop ever known." ("Jeweller's shop," a phrase

current among Papuan miners, means a pocket, or series of pockets, of extreme richness.)

. . . "Jan. 9th.—Limestone country reached again to-day. Covered about five miles, hard going. Carriers very weak, feet badly cut. Jackson somewhat better."

"10th—Much regret to say Jackson killed by natives to-day, evidently belonging to same Tatatata tribe that threatened us at Grace Hill, and left effigies in path. When stopping in stream bed for lunch, shower of spears suddenly thrown from dense bush. One went through Jackson. I fired into bush and ordered carriers to do same. Heard one or two shouts, but on entering bush later nothing to be seen. Attended to Jackson best I could, he did not live three minutes, seems to have been hit in heart. Buried him eight feet deep, piled boulders on top, resumed march. Reached creek I had named Jackson, about five. Camped. More dysentery among carriers, two in bad way."

The record continued, brief and hard, relating deaths of carriers, further attacks by natives, terrible straits for lack of food and, in the limestone country, lack of water; the finding at last of a small patch of sago that enabled them to secure enough food for a last rush back to the Romilly River. Grace had written little after than; the fever that ended his life some weeks later was burning out his strength day by day, and he was barely able to reach the coast alive. There, at a little trading station he died; leaving his gear with the trader; and I, coming along some while after, had bought the stuff for a song. Grace's diary didn't interest the trader, who had native blood, and could barely read and write. I was as sure as anyone

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could be, that my eyes were the first to rest upon it. I had been absolutely sure—till the day I met Jinny Treacher on Thursday Island—that the very word "Tatatata" was unknown to any save myself; that the suggestion, the possibility of immense treasure, contained between the lines of Grace's diary, was my secret alone.

Now that I had passed the trading station again, ascended the river, no Sherlock Holmes was needed to tell me how the secret had got out. That story was contained in one sentence—Grace had written to his girl. He had no doubt hoped to get better, get back to her. He had done exactly as I had done with Pia, as Sir Richard Fanshawe had done with Jinny. Told his girl his secrets. . . .

And Grace's girl had gone out, in an influenza epidemic, not long after. But before that, she had, in her turn, told someone who was, probably, her lover; might have been her lover all along—Fanshawe.

I seemed, in that moment, to see all humanity a network of love, everyone passing secrets along from lover to lover. Government secrets—didn't every European country keep clever unscrupulous women in its pay?—business secrets; family secrets; secrets of scandal, of money-making, of the turf, of scientific discovery, of politics, of the army, the navy; pleasant secrets, disgraceful secrets. Told by a man to a woman; told by her to a man; passed on to a woman again—always between sex and sex at first, then spreading out, from man to man and woman to woman, till it was no longer a secret. . . . And I wondered, knowing well the disintegrating power of love upon reserves hard as iron, resolutions tough as steel, that any secret,

in this love-filled, sweetheart-filled world, should ever be kept for a day.

Well—if Jinny had not spoiled it for me, I had had a fair chance of tearing the heart out of Grace's secret, sweethearts notwithstanding. I might have a chance yet. At all events, I would not give up while a shred of hope remained. On that resolution, I went to sleep.

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Next morning there was fine music, when the carriers got to work clearing and felling the timber we wanted for rafts. Timber felling is one of the world's jolly elementary sounds; you can't help but like it, if you are right made—as you like the many voices of sea and rivers and rain, and the roar of winds and fires, and the slatting, drumming noises of sails in a big breeze. If you have never listened to felling, you don't know the meaning of that term so frequent in cheap poetry, especially eighteenth century cheap poetry and so little understood by those who use it—"echoing woods." You want to hear an axe-stroke thrown back by the breast of the forest as cleanly as a ball is thrown back by the side of a house; you want to hear a bird sending its exultant, mysterious cry to half a dozen points of the compass all at once, to hear the calls and shouts of the timber-workers magnified, made sonorous, lifted into poetry—or at least poetry's raw material—before you can understand to the full that careless epithet.

If I were seventy, sick and old and dying, I think I should feel my heart leap up, as Wordsworth said his heart leaped at the rainbow, everytime I heard,

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in the great woods, the crack of an axe among timber. . . .

Oh yes, I know the explanation that modish science gives. It's the savage ancestor, the cave-man calling. It's the Bolshevik element, the love of destructiveness. It's other things less pretty. . . .

But the savage ancestor, when you have him alive, plucked out of the stone age yesterday afternoon, and set to work clearing, loathes his job as a general thing; it doesn't call him, for nuts. And as to Bolsheviki—well, I have known a few personally during the war and later; good hard axe-work, in person or by proxy, was certainly not the sort of thing that appealed to them; if the timber had been alive and bleeding, and could scream, they might have taken some interest. . . . As for destructiveness, the tearing down of timber in a condemned house is rather more spectacular than clearing, but assuredly leaves one cold.

What do I think about it? I think that it's a part of the whole business of the pioneer life, and I think that whole business has a core in it of something to which—as yet—we can give no name. Unless you call it spiritual vitamins. Most people cherish secret, almost shameful yearnings for wild life; they think they oughtn't to have such yearnings; they're afraid of being laughed at if they tell. You can't put in words the thing that one gets out of pioneer life; and a thing that can't be clearly defined is always open to the japes of the common minded. But there's something in that life that is worth keeping; a thousand times worth keeping. What's a vitamin? Some schoolboy defined it as "the thing which when

you haven't got it you go all wrong in your inside." Apply the simile to civilisation; to the nation that claims to be the most civilised on earth. One of her wise men wrote not long ago:

"Suddenly it has become apparent that few if any places remain where a man can go and do as he pleases. The pleasures of outdoor life as enjoyed in the past will be narrowed increasingly for coming generations, with a consequent loss in the fundamental qualities of our citizens. For these possessions have been of inestimable value in relation to the finer and higher qualities in the life of the people." . . .

And he sends forth a cry, pitiful in the manner of it as well as in the matter; one can see the pale professor yearning through his stately words, as a man may show a sickly face, aching for free sun behind the stately coloured panes of a college window—"Give us . . . some share . . . in the unmodified remainder of the life-world in which we came into being."

Which one might perhaps translate, freely: "For God's sake show me a place where I can go and camp once in a way, out of sight of sandwich papers and tins and out of smell of petrol."

Do you want my belief, you who look furtively at advertisement pictures of emerald seas and leaning palms; who read cowboy yarns on the sly (not knowing that dodos are not deader than the true cowboy, to-day), you who wanted to be sent out somewhere where you could be a "planter" but didn't understand, and for fear of ridicule dared not ask,

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exactly what a planter was, or who sent him, or why? You can have it, whether you want it or not. It is that you were, are, right, and the other people wrong. The men of the outback countries, even when, as rather often happens, they are bad lots, are doing something that has got to be done; preserving something that the world can't live without. They are not, as your worthy uncle no doubt assured you, mere skulkers, hiding away from honest work represented by the law-court, the hospital, the office and the desk. Some of them are Civil servants, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds; keeping the world sweet by preserving and governing the out-back places that are full of the salt of life, and at the same time raising families and qualifying for pensions, just like Government Commissioners and clerks at home. Some of them are rovers pure (more or less) and simple (not so very) living a confoundedly hard life because they like it, and because freedom is more to them than anything else in the whole wide earth. But take my word for it, you are not far wrong in envying any or all of them. They're making and keeping vitamins for the soul of the world.

I shall no doubt appear somewhat mad, when I confess that I told a good deal of this, in other words, to Jinny, while I was tramping about the banks of the Romilly, directing the boys, picking out trees, and once in a way taking a hand with a full axe myself; it "got on my nerves" as women say, to see the carriers fiddling about with threequarter axes, in that glorious timber. Jinny tramped with me. She said she didn't like to be left alone, because of natives; and that she loved to see trees felled. "It smells so bonzer," she

said, sniffing up the heady essence of all things green and wild, that fills the air when felling is under way.

"What do you think?" I asked her, after an hour or so of fitful talk.

Jinny was nonplussed. She had a good enough headpiece of her own, despite lack of education.

"I don't quite get what you mean, Phil," she said, thoughtfully, chewing a rootlet of wild sugarcane. "But I lay there's somethink in it. I seem to feel what you say, if I don't understand it. Me, I'd live in a humpy in the bush with the right person—tomorrow, and I wouldn't look back, or be sorry for anythin' I hadn't got. You don't believe that, maybe, but it's true. I've had so much, Phil. I've eaten me dinner—lots of dinners—and I wouldn't be hankerin' to know what's the taste of asparagus, or if champagne's as nice as people says it is. That's in a manner of speakin'—figurative, you know," she hastened to explain. "What I mean——"

"I know. I understand. You mean that over-civilised people need what the bush can give, even more than others."

"May be I do, and maybe I don't," she said, eyeing me sidelong. "But Phil, there's one thing I can tell you, and if you don't like it, you can lump it. *She* won't."

"Who won't what, Jinny? You're getting mysterious."

"Well, if I'm mysterious, I'll clear things up. I tell you strite, if you think the Laurier girl is going to live up rivers and in blacks' camps, you've got another think comin'."

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There was a moment's silence. The river made no noise; quiet as sleep or death, it slipped along, tea-green in colour, between almond-green banks of trees. Whip-like, the axes cracked in the forest. An "orderly bird" began calling sharply. "Orderly!" it cried, from some unseen fastness on the far bank. "Orderly!" You would have sworn it had summoned the defaulter a dozen times, was getting out of patience. . . .

"Where are you going when I get you back to Daru?" I asked Jinny, presently. I do not care to say how angry I was, that she should dare to speak of Pia before me.

Jinny flushed scarlet at the snub. One of her lightning changes flashed across the mobile face that was so near to mine.

"I can go to hell for all that you care, can't I?" she said, in a voice that was suddenly half a dozen tones higher. She seized a stem of white bush lily, and began tearing the flower to pieces. It hurt me, somehow, to see her do it; that flower—tall, slim, white, delicately sweet—had always reminded me of Pia.

"No, Jinny," I answered, watching the petals fall like rain from her angry fingers. "You're wrong there. God bless me, girl, do you think there's any man alive could see as much of you as I have, and not be fond of you? Care what happens to you? You bet I do. I'm going to see you safe to Daru, and safe into a boat that'll take you back to Australia, which is a jolly sight better place for wandering little girls to be in than this cruel country.

"But I'll remember you always, and you mustn't forget me."

She was silent; she stood beside me on the river bank, tall and thin and motionless, as one of the long palms that grew in the sheltered verge of the bush. Her beautiful, hungry face, with its avid eyes, was fixed on the sliding Romilly river—the Romilly, that came from God-knows-where, that ran to a sea still unvisited by ships in the days when Jinny and I were born. The sound of the carriers' clearing had shifted farther away; hack, hack, went the axes, dully, muffled by distance. There was a pause; through it arose, exultingly, the voice of a Mambarè cannibal, singing the death-song of the tree. . . . Followed a rending crash, and shouts in chorus.

There is something in the fall of a great tree that lets things loose; things that have nothing to do (on the surface) with trees. Genevieve Treacher had been one woman in the instant before that crash. In the instant after, she was another—another of the many Jinnies, to know all of whom have needed great part of any man's days; would have been worth it . . . perhaps. . . .

She swung round from the river; she faced me, tall as I, filled, as I, with the fires and forces of youth; strong, supple as a tigress, brave as a tigress; a woman made for the wilds, if ever one was so made. Her breath came sharply through her nostrils; with a magnificent gesture never learned in any dancer's school (and indeed, the schools but spoil such women as Jinny) she flung both arms out, wide to the fingertips.

"I'm not askin' marriage, Phil Amory," she said. "I'm askin'—I'm askin'—just a hut down somewhere at the mouth of the river, and me waitin' for you to come back, since you won't have me on the trip.

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And I'll stick to you—and follow you——” She fought for breath. “You pulled me away from the sharks,” she said. “You sent your trip to blazes and never cared. You walked in among them howlin’ alligators to get me a drink of water. You’re the first real man I’ve ever—ever—Phil, will you leave me in that hut when you go?”

She was as modest, almost virginal, in her self-betrayal as any girl. I don’t know how, but in that moment I recognised a truth that, so far, had not come my way. I realised how such a woman as Jinny may regenerate herself; I realised, with a wrench of soul and body painful beyond all telling, that I, and no other, was the man to help her to it.

But between us stood the wraith of Pia, my white rose, my star, Pia who some day, God willing, should pass the ivory gate of dreams with me, into a paradise of which I was unworthy, which, nevertheless, I could not give up, if the salvation of a hundred Jinnies stood in the way.

If there had never been a Pia. . . .

Jinny, like many flame-haired, flame-spirited women, was ever so little clairvoyant. She read my thought.

“Phil—strite, Phil,” she said. “Is it because of me goin’ gay—same as you yourself have gone, I’ll lay—that you won’t? Because, if that’s all——”

I couldn’t answer her. I put my hands on her wide, thin shoulders; her face was on a level with my own, and I kissed it. “You’re the best girl in all the world, and I love you, Jinny,” I said.

Unerringly, she read my meaning through my words.

“I’m the best girl—but one?” she said.

To deny Pia was to trample on the cross of my faith.

"Yes," I answered, feeling as if I had struck her.

"Then, if there hadn't been any Miss Lauriers in the world, it'd 'a been all right with you and me?"

I could not answer her. There was no need. She flung me away with a suddenness and strength that all but sent me down among the trampled palm leaves by the river side. She was transformed, instantly, into a hag of the streets. As she might look in twenty years' time, battered, destroyed, so she looked now, in one awful moment of prophecy. She gave a scream that reminded me of the screams of torn horses during the war, and ran wildly down the bank of the river. I don't know where she thought she was going—maybe to a spot further on, where the current swept, deep and oily, past a high corner of the bank—where, if she had leaped, the alligators would have had her before I, or any other, could have done anything to help—but she was, in another moment, checked, as I was checked in my pursuit, by the amazing, unexpected sight of a Government launch on a lower reach of the river, rapidly heading towards myself and Jinny.

They stopped as soon as they saw us, and slung out a dinghy. I saw that Bassett was in charge; Bassett, with a score of native police, standing on deck and looking very businesslike in their uniform loin cloths and jumpers of navy and red, bandoliers across their chests and rifles handy on the hatch. The launch was drifting with the current; Bassett secured her by a cable passed round a tree, before he came up to me

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and to Jinny, who was standing white, staring, but more or less self-possessed, a little distance away. I wondered how much he had seen; realised that I was never likely to know, Bassett being when he chose, as close-mouthed as any crab. . . .

"Well," he said, with a certain forced cheerfulness, "so you've saved me half my trip; that's very obliging of you."

"May one ask," I demanded, "what the blazes the Government is doing up here?"

"You can ask without the blazes. The Government has business anywhere. We've been sent up to save this young lady from being carried off by cannibals like the star in a picture show. The G.S. was at Daru in the *Tauri*, and news came down the coast—native telegraph, you know—that a white "sinabada" had gone up the Romilly in a canoe with half-a-dozen boys, meaning to strike inland. So the G.S. turned a hand-spring and had three cat-fits, and packed me off without my lunch. So here's the *Tauri* to take her back; only I see you've been beforehand with us." He glanced with interest at the figure of Jinny, who was contriving to look amazingly dignified in my khaki shirt and trousers. "By the way, Sheep," he went on, "what's become of your expedition?" For he—like everyone else "down West"—had known of my departure.

It was difficult to answer him. "I came back," was my lame reply.

"Well," he said, "Well"—after a pause, during which he had looked swiftly, keenly, at both of us. "I suppose I'm to have the pleasure of fetching you along to Daru also?"

I was thinking rapidly; calculating just what this

new turn in my affairs might mean. The *Tauri* was a fast launch; she could take me home in a day and a half; half a day to fix up matters there, and get stores—those eternal “stores”, in which the history of Papua, to the casual observer, would seem to be written. Then a day and half back, in the *Tauri* again—I calculated that the Government would owe me so much for doing its work at my own cost. Half a day for contingencies. Two days to get through my four days’ cut in the bush. . . . Eight days in all from now ought to see me—should see me, if I were alive, once more at the point I had turned back.

Eight days! I might have been half across the Pia Laurier Ranges. I might have known—what perhaps nobody would ever know, now. Because the natives would undoubtedly have been roused and warned; might be waiting with the table laid and the cooking pots on—so to speak (as a matter of fact, I knew that they didn’t use pots, preferring a simple roast). Well, there were always two sides to that matter, and I had permission to use armed carriers. If there was no one ahead of me. . . .

“I suppose,” I said to the waiting Bassett, “that you didn’t see any sign of another party on the river.”

Bassett was busy lighting a cigarette.

“You suppose wrong, then,” he said, his head bent over his hands. “There’s a prospecting and exploring party down at the river mouth at this minute.” He did not look at me as he spoke. Bassett was—is—a little gentleman.

“How soon can we get away?” was my reply.

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"As soon as you can chuck your carriers on board, and get you and this lady on."

He kicked me, slyly, and I replied, as intended, with an introduction to Jinny.

"I'm sorry to offer you such rough accommodation, Miss Treacher," he apologised, fixing her with his grave ministerial stare. "But you are fairly lucky to be alive this minute, which I suppose is some compensation."

"Do you?" said Jinny. "I don't," and turned her back on him. I could only tap my forehead, and nod significantly at Bassett. "The bush," I explained, as he moved a little away. It was explanation enough, for anyone who saw less clearly through a stone wall than Bassett usually did. "Well," I thought wearily. "I don't see how anywhere, anyhow, I could have done otherwise than I did—but I seem to have got myself and other people pretty thoroughly into the soup over it, all the same."

We made a very silent party, dropping down river. With the current, and the speed of the launch, it was a comparatively short journey. Dusk of next day found us on the opening reaches of the Romilly's estuary, with the Gulf of Papua, flat and grey as a pewter table, opening out before. There was a long strip of beach at the river mouth; you could scarcely see it at that hour, because it was almost all black—black mud, black sand, black mangrove mazes, with a bare tufting of leaves, that in the daylight shone sickly, sparkly green. But if you could not see the beach, you could see, quite clearly, that which stood upon it—the pointed shapes of several canvas tents. A smallish, flat-bottomed ketch, swayed dizzily to some invisible pulse of the water, out beyond the beach,

where she was anchored. Cooking fires had been lit on shore; their light was doubled in the dusky tide-water, as if the fires had soaked through mud and sand, sending roots of raspberry-coloured flame down into the bay.

"We'll stop here for a few minutes," said the magistrate. "I didn't call going up; just hailed them, and asked if they had seen anything of a white woman."

"What did they say?" I asked.

"One of them—Caxon, it was, I think; I hear he went with them—shouted back that they hadn't, and asked who she was, and what it was about."

"Caxon," I said. "Who were the others?"

"Only one other white. You know him—Spicer." He gave an order to the brown, bare-limbed steersman; and our boat took a wide sweep, and began heading inshore. Jinny, who had gone down into the cabin as soon as we started, now put up her head for the first time, silently scanned the encampment, and as silently slipped back again. A feeble glow arising shortly after, told us that she had lit the cabin lamp.

"Caxon!" I thought, as we rushed to shore. "Spicer is not such a fool as he looks." For Caxon, old-time goldminer, and survivor of a past era of mining successes, was about the ablest prospector who ever washed a dish between Daru and the Mambarè.

"Do me a kindness, Bassett, will you?" I said, when the rattle of the anchor chain had died. "Don't mention to anyone ashore just where it was that you picked us up."

"Right. You not coming?"

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"No fear."

"Miss Treacher coming?"

"I don't——"

Silently Jinny's head appeared above the coaming, cutting off my words. She stepped out on deck. There was still some light left; I could see that she had found Bassett's store of clothing, and looted it ruthlessly. A cummerbund of dark-blue silk circled the waist of her—my—trousers; she had white socks on, and a silk tie about her neck.

A clean, starched and ironed handkerchief—nobody but Bassett would have such a thing, on such a trip—peeped out of her breastpocket. She had used the make-up from which no adventure separated her, in true artist fashion; just a touch of geranium on her faun-like mouth, and a darker line on eyebrows that were perhaps too golden; no rouge, no dredged-on powder; magnolia paleness only, and a demeanour that "registered", to perfection, the qualities of shyness and reserve.

I looked at her in amazement, as she swung lightly down into the boat, avoiding my eyes (she had not looked at me, or spoken to me, since we came aboard). I saw her go ashore with Bassett, disappear among the tents, and then the dusk came down in good earnest, and there was nothing to be seen save those long-rooted flames upon the verge of the water, and the drunken swaying of the ketch's riding-light.

Before I had time to grow more than a little impatient, the boat was back again, and the launch under way. After the steamy heat of that motionless spell, it was good to feel the wind again upon face and arms; to see the black bow of the launch stemming through stars on stars, and more stars, myriads of

them, sparkling and tossing in our wake, as if we drove through some miraculous field of gold. . . .

. . . Gold! The word halted me dead, tripped me over my own thoughts. Gold! What had Jinny been saying, doing, out there in the camp? Why had she been so anxious to go ashore, and why, now that she had returned, was she still keeping hidden, avoiding sight or sound of me?

Bassett was sitting on the cabin roof, a whitish blue in the dark. I edged up to him—one had to walk cautiously, in that welter of arms, cases, sacks, carriers and police—and asked him point blank. . . .

“Did you—anyone—say anything ashore?”

He knew what I meant. He did not look up, or turn his face, but he answered immediately, in Bassett’s own crisp, precise way—

“I saw Spicer. I asked him what the delay was; asked if I could assist in any way. He said no; it was all right; they had stopped because he wished to buy sago; they’d be off to-morrow at daylight. I got back to the boat then. Miss Treacher,”—he spoke carefully, seeming to weigh his words even more than usual—“Miss Treacher stayed behind for a while; I waited for her.”

“Was she——” I stopped; it was difficult to phrase.

“There appeared,” said Bassett precisely, “to be something in the nature of a friendly understanding between her and Mr. Spicer.”

“Did you get any idea—any——”

“The course was rather imperfect; but I gathered an impression that she was pointing out to Mr. Spicer something in connection with the course of the Romilly River.”

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On purred the launch; the stars fell away right and left from her wake. Going forward, where I could be more or less alone, I sat on deck, and digested as best as I could this unwelcome news. It did not help matters, or make me more hopeful, that I heard, once in a way, a sound like someone, down below, trying to stifle bitter weeping.

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CHAPTER IX

GOLDEN GRAVEL

EIGHT days passed, and another two to that, before I stood again upon the ridge that I had topped with so light a heart, on the morning that saw the unexpected arrival of Jinny. I was not lighthearted now; I was merely dogged; determined to go on at any and every cost; lose if I must, but at least lose fighting.

I had gone back, replaced my stores, endured with what patience I might—and that was little—the hundred and one delays that always block the path of the Papuan traveller, and got away almost by main force. First, however, I had seen Jinny safe aboard a local steamer that was going to Port Moresby. Why she wanted to go there, what she was going to do when she arrived, I could not conceive, and, in face of her hostile, obstinate silence, had little chance of finding out. I could only congratulate myself on the fact that Pia and she were unlikely to meet, since Pia's boat must now have sailed for Sydney; say as kindly a goodbye to Jinny as she would allow, and privately hope—with a grudging, smarting kind of hope that was entirely illogical, but, I suppose, human—that she would console herself as speedily as might be.

Then, being free, I hurried to my former turning-back point, having coaxed Bassett to give me a lift

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right up to the landing place, and once landed, driven the boys and myself for every ounce that was in us, up towards what I still hoped might be eventually called the Pia Laurier Range.

There was need for haste. I was not in the least surprised, when I reached the beginning of my cut through the forest, to find that others had passed that way since. The camp fires of Spicer and Caxon, the skeletons of their tent poles, their empty tins thrown away, were marks plain enough for the veriest newchum to understand. For me, who was no newchum, there was much more; things more disturbing, because more significant of trouble, traces of natives, who were clearly spying and following. A broken bamboo pipe; spent arrows, barbed to the length of one's hand; a head-feather, swept away and caught on a high branch, where it stood up wickering in the wind with the extraordinary live motion that the Papuan alone can impart to his ornaments—these and other signs were plain to read, and caused me to ginger up my sentries as one does in the bush, with threats and lawyer cane, also to cut down my own sleep to the very last point compatible with keeping on the road in the day. I slept on a hair trigger when I did sleep, and, towards dawn, sat waking; for the hour just verging on day is the hour of danger, in the bush country of New Guinea. We had three weeks' stores, no more, since a native cannot carry more than he can eat in about twenty-one days.

On this journey I dared not spare time for depôt making, and would not spare it for the weary job of cutting and washing out sago, that is part of most exploring trips. I gambled on the chance of trade; I had some stores of beads, salt and knives with me,

and meant to use them when fairly driven to do so. Trading with the cannibal tribes of the unexplored interior is playing with death; but starvation is death; so there's little choice between the two.

The day that took me into what should have been unknown country was no day of joy. I knew that Spicer and Caxon had passed before me—guided by Jinny's tale-telling, which I had never doubted from the moment when I heard her weeping in the *Tauri's* cabin. The glory, the glamour, had gone from the scenery, magnificent though it was. Ridge on ridge, sharp as the run of towering tidal waves; huge formless hills, faintly suggesting couching elephants, and hump-shouldered rhinoceroses; forests small and fine as mosses on a stone, clinging to the knees of incredible ranges that soared up and up and ever upwards, ice-blue in the highest heavens—and all, beyond the line on which I stood, new, untrodden, unknown to any but the wild boars and the wandering cassowaries, and native scarces less wild than they, unknown . . . if it had not been for Caxon and Spicer.

I need not say that I looked for traces of the party, ceaselessly, but so far, I had seen no signs of them in the distance ahead. There was no spire of smoke, no sound of steel axes—unmistakable in country where the stone axe is the only foresting tool. Traces of the Tatatata tribes had vanished, too. When I set out upon the new stage of the journey, I was, to all appearances, as much alone with my boys as if no other human creature had been left alive upon the island-continent of New Guinea.

It was here, as I had told Jinny, luckless Jinny, that the real work began. Down those appalling ridges, down half a day into a gorge as narrow as a railway

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cutting, then up again, climbing with feet and hands, hauling oneself by roots and stems of trees, seeing the river at the bottom of the gorge gleam silver from beneath the bend of your elbow as you climbed, ever climbed, then a moment's breather on a ridge that you could straddle like a horse, swept by winds cutting the very skin off your sweating face—down instantly again into the steam and the sliding and the mud and roots and leeches and scrub ticks and snakes, down to another river. And so up and down again without pause, save when a rare chance of following the knife-edge top of some ridge occurred, and gave you a short, much-needed relief—this was the day. Sometimes the river would prove too wide and deep to cross, roaring along in a succession of white-toothed rapids among black cruel rocks; then we would fell a tree as rapidly as possible and, one after another, cross it like rope dancers.

As the day wore on, we gained elevation in spite of constantly losing it almost as fast as won; by late afternoon, the air was chill on the ridges, and the light had taken on that crystalline, blue-shadowed aspect that tells of increasing height. It was the hardest of work; sometimes we had to climb straight-up precipices, almost sheer walls of stone, by the help of the trailing vines that hung down them; sometimes we scrambled painfully along the tops of boulders in a river bed, sometimes—worst of all—we had to turn back, lose the height and the distance gained, and find, at infinite pains, another way across a ridge that had fairly beaten us. And all this had to be done, not at leisure but at the highest speed which I and the carriers could possibly keep up without leaving any of the party behind. I had picked my boys; they

were all mountaineers, capable of scrambling up a one-in-two height with fifty pounds on their backs, till further orders; capable, as these mountain fellows are, of lowering the pride of a white man into the dust, with what they can do and what they will endure; yet, in sum, childlike, panicky, dependent utterly on the leader. If I didn't take them through, these brown, bloodthirsty, muscular babies of mine, if anything happened to me, they would never, any one of them, see home and wife and children again; that was sure. And if they were to fail me, run away from me, as carriers have done times without number, it was all Port Moresby to a mango that nobody on the coast would ever catch sight or sound of "Black Sheep" Amory, any more. We were dependent, utterly, on each other.

During these days of crossing the foothill ranges, and creeping by compass bearing, ever nearer and nearer to the home country of the Tatatatata, we became good friends with one another, my boys and I. Some of them could talk pigeon English; I knew the dialects used by others, and at night, when camp had been made, and supper eaten, and the bone-wrenching fatigues of the day given way to the influence of rest and food, we used to hold strange conversations, close to the glowing heart of the camp-fires, now becoming grateful and pleasant at night. It seemed to me, in those evenings, that I slipped somehow, into another dimension of the mind; saw the world from an angle so new that I cannot pretend to set it forth. These stone-age creatures, who melted into the dusk so complete that, of an evening, you could see nothing at all of them but their dog-tooth coronets and the shifting whites of their eyes, were ever more and more

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incomprehensible, the closer you came to the core of their minds; yet the glimpses you got of a world entirely different from yours, spurred you on to ask and ask again. . . . There was, I don't know what of freshness, of something that I have called the vitamins of the mind, in their outlook; some of it was good, and some of it indescribably devilish; and one was not more fascinating, calling, than the other.

"What would Pia think of it all?" I asked myself, wonderingly. If she, the white-rose maiden, had been here. . . . I tried to picture it.

She would have loved the adventure. She would have thrilled responsive to the wonder of the scenery, to the untellable scents of the forest, scents that catch and stir the heart as no flower of civilised gardens ever has power to do. She would have turned the bright mirror of her mind on to the hundred and one strange things told, and half told, by the brown men of the wilderness; (I figured myself sub-editing some of it, before handing it on). She would have pondered it, found it delightful and delightfully told me so; to-morrow, would have forgotten it all. The sporting spirit in Pia would have made her a charming companion; I could fancy her, in exactly the right dress, the right boots, shooting, fishing, gypsying generally.

. . . . But. . . .

"If you think the Laurier girl is goin' to live up rivers and in blacks' camps, you've got another think comin'."

Jinny's rough verdict, couched in the semi-American slang that Sydney's fast life uses now-a-days, came back to me—came back.

Of course I had known it. I had never seriously contemplated such an outrage on probability, as that

I should place the daughter of the Lauriers in a New Guinea stick house with a head-hunter for cook, and go on with my recruiting and trading. Pia's money alone would have made such a thing laughable. She'd have built a Toorak villa on the banks of the Fly, and imported a French chef, had I asked her to share my life just as it was, without any ifs and perhappes. But while one side of my mind had known, assented to this, the other had persistently dreamed.

I don't know what I hoped for; I saw pictures, that was all. And the pictures showed, always, the primeval forest, the great sad rivers, that were my true home, with Pia—somehow—beside me.

It seemed that this trip, with all its solitude, its contact with the stone-age world, had been needed to show me that these fancies were flimsier than butterfly wings. I knew now—and little pleasure the knowledge gave me—that there was only one girl who would be content, at home, in the Papuan wilds, and that girl was not my rose-maiden, but Genevieve Treacher—"Gin-Sling".

Dreams, dreams! It was not dreams that lay before me now. If I meant to be fit next day, it was time for sleep.

.

I could, if I would, write the tale of every hour of that journey; relate in their order each blow of Nature and of Fate, and every counter that I made; tell of hunger and of thirst, of weariness macerating mind and body into one insensitive pulp. I could tell of revolts among the savages who accompanied me, of rough means used to subdue them. . . . Of the explorer's "black beast"—fever—that threw me helpless

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on my bed of sticks, burned my flesh, and shook my bones returning, even after it had been conquered, to ride me through the bush for days, like some fierce panther clinging to the bowed shoulders of a staggering, still running, prey. . . . Of a midday when I and my boys, resting, were leaped on from the forest behind, and surrounded before you could have drawn two breaths, by tall brown devils whirling clubs and spears, and yelping the head-hunter's horrible dog-show yelp. Of how we fought them, one to five, and I, firing low, shot one through the belly, and another through the chest, before they closed; almost ashamed I was, a trained soldier against these creatures with their savage weapons; and yet numbers are numbers, and they did not fear our strength, had to learn. Of how they drew off and came again, charging in line, pluckier than you would believe, so that I'd have spared them if I could; but they brained my two best carriers, and the other carriers rushed in behind me, clubbing with rifle butts where they could not fire; and so in five minutes it was over, and the tribe off into the bush again, with a head they'd taken from one of the corpses while the fighting was too hot for me to notice. . . . And my fellows, as savage as the others, finished that day's march with heads, four of them, slung on top of their loads, singing as they went. And the work they had round the fire at night with them, the primitive taxidermy, the painting and the feathering, I'd tell you, but you would not listen. . . .

Yes, I could tell much, a volume. But I will pass over that journey, in retrospect, more easily than I passed in fact, and come to the crucial day, the morning when I made Tatatata.

I guessed I might be near; I had thought so for a day or two, but it was impossible to say exactly. Northanger, that fine geographer and explorer, could have told to an inch. Purchase or Bassett, used to uncharted travels, would have had a very good notion of where they were, and how much remained to be done. I could only guess, and use my head for country, which had served me well enough so far. Somewhere within two days' march of the pit, I reckoned myself to be, and that was good enough; there was cheer in it, hope in it, something to set weary legs climbing more briskly, fill a tired, discouraged mind with bright pictures of what might come to-morrow. . . .

We were climbing a ridge, just like a hundred ridges that we had climbed since the start; foremost carriers slowly hacking way for the rest through a mess of liana, lawyer and trailing bamboo; leeches waving tails and dancing on the ends of branches, eager to sink their teeth in our flesh; other leeches hanging in gorged and clotted bunches from legs, arms, ears of the party; ants with hot-pincer jaws running free in our hair—all as it had been for days. The ground was steep beneath our feet, as it had been for days; no down slopes of late, no maddening gullies, into which one slid with slacked muscles and angry mind, knowing too well that double payment must be made for the relief. The air was thinning; nights had been colder; wild strawberries, in the moss glowed here and there like fiery eyes of imps; now and then a daisy marked increasing altitude. Yet, I did not think that we were very near; did not guess (perhaps the bout of fever had marred my reckoning) that the lane of our long journey was reaching its turn at last.

In front of us, the sky began to show pale through

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thinning tree-tops. "I'll halt there," I said, "and fall a look-out." For you must cut down a score or so of trees, when you want to see where you are, in a Papuan forest. You make a clearing, and climb the tallest trunk. On the top of a ridge is the best place to fell.

"Come on," I said to the carriers. "Double ration to-night." I had been holding back a little; I could afford that spur.

They raised a shout, and I shouted with them, for encouragement. And so shouting, plunging upward and forward, like the men of Xenophon when they came upon the sea, we topped the ridge, found empty air before us, and saw—The Pit.

By Heaven, it was a wonderful sight. I was to see it often after, but never once did I come upon it, without something of the first thrill that seized me when I broke out of the forest, and viewed, lying far below me, the enormous slopes of the nameless basin, in the finding of which two white lives, and many dark, had already been lost. Others yet were to be sucked down by that strange earth-maelstrom before it was done with. Some undercurrent of prophetic feeling may have hinted that to me, or else I was simply worn out. After the first flush of ecstasy, a strange quietness came upon me.

More calmly than I could have believed possible, I looked down the long fall-away of landscape below, over the miles of sinking ground, to where the basin, clearly defined, curved itself down into a centre that looked, at this distance, no bigger than a bedroom. I knew it was more, however; I knew the whole thing was huge in scale. The countryside, forested, river-seamed, lit by flashes of green reed-grass, spired by

minarets of barren upstanding rock, was wider by far than it looked; and all of it fell away, league on league, into this basin; all centred itself, at last, in the little room-like space at the end and heart of it.

I looked at the rocks; marked the lie of the hills, the nature of the whole place, remembered all I had heard of mining lore, and struck my hand, violently, upon the nearest tree.

"Found," I shouted. "I'm made—I'm made for ever!"

Then, across the visions of gold, gold and more gold, that blazed on my inner sight, came wonderfully slowly, as come lovely things, a picture that outshone all other glories. From the horizon the clouds of early afternoon were shredding away, blown by some distant wind that left untouched the still trees of the basin, never stirred the long grasses where I and the carriers stood at gaze. Slowly, steadily, the veils were withdrawn, making bare to my sight the far, high, ice-blue peaks of the Pia Laurier range.

"I've seen it," I thought, and as if a sacrament had been celebrated, splendidly, before me. "It's hers," I thought; and in the same moment. "It's herself."

I have written the name of my lady wide across the maps of Papua; but it is true that Nature had written it there, before me. The sun was westering; it was impossible to descend into the pit that day. With pity I remembered how Grace and Jackson, starving, sick, at the end of their resources, had stood where I stood now, looking, like Moses, over a Promised Land on which they never were to set foot. If it was hard

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for me to wait until next morning only, what must it have been to them to see all this, know what it meant, and leave it behind? Yet they had done right. The descent was all of two thousand feet, the country rocky and difficult; Grace and Jackson and the wretched remnant of their boys, even if they had succeeded in getting down to that distant hole, would certainly never have found strength to climb up again. The route through the limestone country had been their destruction. No one, assuredly, would ever go that way again—now that I had shown another.

On this, I remembered what, for the moment, had entirely escaped my mind—the Spicer expedition. I had thought much of it in the last few days, and wondered where it was. Traces of a party ahead had vanished some time before; but that was no serious puzzle; a very little deviation from the route I followed might explain it. I had been sure, however, that I should see or hear something of them when I arrived at the Pit. I hadn't really hoped to catch up the start given to Spicer by Jinny's impulsive treachery; without doubt, I had thought, they would be there before me. . . .

It seemed they were not. In the last sun of afternoon, every pinnacle and boulder, each tree, each channelled stream course, of the whole immense basin stood out, some roughly-drawn, near at hand, others, miles away, etched in with needle-point fineness but all as clear as a steel engraving seen through a piece of golden glass. And from end to end, there was no sign of life.

I could not understand this; it looked like trouble of some kind, I thought—but even so, what business

of mine was any trouble of Spicer's? He and his friend had made their own bed; let them lie on it. For me, there was victory; discovery; and, if I knew the signs of gold—wealth too. Wealth such as no one in Papua had ever dreamed of, maybe; for no one in Papua had ever seen such a formation in gold-bearing country. I simply did not dare to think what it might mean. I have, since then, heard the explanation offered by geological science for the extraordinary place. If I were to write it, all but geologists would skip it; so I will let it go. . . .

You may be sure there was no lying late abed for anyone next morning. I had the boys up at four o'clock; their food was cooked and eaten, camp struck, and everyone ready to start, before the first mysterious greys began to show above the basin's farther rim. Grey turned to geranium-colour as we made our start downwards; in the first hollows and chines, there was scarcely light enough to see one's way, but by and by the strong warm sun came up with a shout, and we bathed in flowing gold.

It was a rough road down; as far as I could judge, no foot of brown man or of white had ever conquered those glacis and moraines of rock, plunged through those intricate, thorny areas of bush, been trapped, as we were trapped, time and again, by impassable gorges slanting across the way, and compelling one to hark back and look for another path. Progress was incredibly slow; still we kept on at it, determined to reach the bottom of the pit before dark. No mid-day halt was even thought of; through the heat of the day, foodless, without rest, we plunged and struggled on. And we had our reward. It was not

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more than half past four, by my watch, when we topped a ridge of strangely heaped, wild rocks that for a while had barred our view, and saw, so near that we could almost have taken a long leap into it, the Pit.

It ought to have been a lake, but it was not; deep clefts in the surrounding walks showed why. It looked, on the whole, very like the dry bottom of a lake, a smallish one, spread over with gravel and broken by ridges of stone. I looked at this, and I looked at the water channels, bare now, in the dry season, that scored the sides of the enormous funnel; at the rocks among which I stood, at the type of rock that made the ranges above. Across my mind flashed one inevitable simile; but before I could give it speech, Ogo, a Mambarè carrier, worn bowed and thin by work on many goldfields, took the words out of my mouth.

"Taubada, all same bokkis," he said.

It was. It was a natural sluice-box, if ever there was one. (I am not all sure that there ever was another). The sharp sides, the gravelly "wash" at the bottom, the "riffles" of rock, the cave-openings through which water could pass away, without materially disturbing anything that had been swept down to the flat—swept, rainy season after rainy season, year after year, century after . . .

"Hold on," I thought. "You're losing your head; such things don't happen." But I found that I was shaking and trembling.

Ogo watched me with an expressionless, toffee-coloured eye. Some unoccupied corner of my mind became aware that he knew what I was feeling; had

seen it all often, long ago, in the red days of the Yodda and the Aikora; understood it and was bored with it. . . . The other carriers had dumped their loads, interested only in the fact that we had come early to our night's camping place, and that there was time for a laze and a smoke before the work of cutting tent-poles.

I did not notice them; I did not cast more than half a thought to Ogo. I left the pack of them there on the rim of the little flat, and plunged downwards. We had done a hard day's work, but I took those rocks, those stretches of sloping sand and gravel, as a fairy-tale wearer of seven-league boots might have done. It was diving rather than descending. I took a toss at the very last, and came down with hands and feet outspread like a starfish, on a bed of gravel that cut my palms, and tore the knees of my trousers. I raised myself up; I wasn't hurt, scratched merely, but my hands and my knees were all over blood and gravel . . . and gold.

The light was stealing up the sides of the huge basin; from the small flat at the bottom, dusk rose like a smoky vapour. High up it was still clear; a chain of hornbills, black against blue, trailed itself over the rim of the hills and fled. I could hear their distant, clanging cries; when they stopped, I could hear—so still was the valley—the muffled drum of my own heart, thumping, now, quite slowly, as I sat in the midst of my kingdom, of my dream made real. Why feel excited over it? The thing was done and won, the long fight over. Two handfuls of golden gravel had changed my world.

"I am Black Sheep no more," was the first thought I can remember. It was not entirely pleasurable.

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There are sweet pastures for black, wild sheep, and for them only. . . . This gold discovery—I did not doubt or minimise its value; I knew too much for that—meant no small fortune, no quiet, comfortable sufficiency; it meant perhaps millions, and what millions brought with them. Black Sheep no more. Wanderer no more. The wild places no more. How could a man of millions live in what Gin-Sling had caustically termed “a hole in the bush”?

I thought these things; I was calm; I did not even get up and go delving in the half-dark for more of the golden sands; yet, under all, I was conscious of a warm intoxication; somebody, not quite I, was cheering loudly, shouting insensately over and over, “Gold, gold!” Somebody was dancing, rejoicing, declaring that this was one for Mrs. Laurier; that there would be no death-rays about her reception of the discoverer of Tatatata goldfield, by and by. Somebody was singing conqueror songs, exulting, as a soldier in a taken town exults (did I not remember!) over the sure, near capture of the girl.

I listened to this fellow for a while; he seemed to be natural and reasonable enough. But he was not I—not quite I. Perhaps it was then that I learned, for the first time, how impossible, all life through, is the satisfaction, together, of all the men that make up any man.

On that, I went to supper, and to rest. First, however, I washed from my hands the dirt and blood and gold—that symbolical, inseparable three—examined the gold with care, as it seeped to the bottom of the enamelled basin, and found its amount, and quality, surprising. “There’s been nothing like it—there never will be, again.” I thought. “And it’s that

pinch of yellow, not anything I am or might be, that has made me worthy of the most splendid girl on earth. A mad world, my masters!"

The peaks of the Pia Laurier range, far, fairy-blue in the mounting moon, looked down upon me as I slept.

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CHAPTER X

THE BROODING STORM

It was nearing ten o'clock, which is late in the morning for people who rise at five, and Ogo and I were at the end of a long job.

We had left the other carriers busy wooding and watering above, had gone down on to the flat, bringing with us pick, shovel, pegs, prospecting dish, and long steel measuring tape, worked about a bit among the "riffles" made by half sunken rocks, and taken sand and gravel from promising spots. I had washed out a few dishes, and found them go something like three ounces of fine gold to a dish, with nuggets to spare, over and above; on an average, about fifteen pounds worth to every dish we washed. It was a veritable jewellers' shop; you could kick the sand up with your toes and see it glitter. There were some acres on the little flat, though it looked from above as if you could have covered it with the cloth of a fairly big dinner table; and every rood had thousands of pounds worth of gold in it, washed down into the flat from all the peaks of all the hills that surrounded it—those quartz peaks, with diorite here and there, that fairly shouted "Gold". Not all the gold of the Pia Laurier range had come down to the bottom of the basin; some of it, no doubt, had sunk through the stream-beds that channelled the slopes (disappearing

streams, most of them, of the kind known to the inner ranges of Papua); some might have been washed away, in the rainy season, across the flat itself into the caves that communicated with unknown depths below. But the rock riffles, and the hollowed shape of the basin, had taken care of most of the mountains' treasure; the place was, as Ogo had said, a natural sluice-box.

I had a right, as discoverer (for Grace and his partner had never actually found gold) to peg out for myself one area of a hundred feet by fifty, and a prospecting claim due to me as discoverer of a field forty miles from any other—of thirty further claims. This left little for anyone else who might come along. . . . "My troubles!" I said. "Let them want. They meant to let me." Some of the ground, judged by what we washed, was a little richer than the rest. I picked that, measured, pegged, nailed up my notice, and was done. The warden of the field, when appointed, would have to check and confirm the work; but for all practical purposes, I had my ground secure.

The sun was high now, and down in the airless bottom of the pit, it had grown hot; so hot that the sweat ran in streams down my arms, and dripped salty from my forehead into my mouth.

"Smoke-oh," I said to the boy, contemplating with pleasure the neat white pegs that marked off my fortune. Ogo wiped a wet face with a wet arm, felt for his tobacco in the fibre bag that he carried, found his bamboo pipe, and lay down under the shade of a rock. He had made no comment at all on the gold, or the claim, or the whole colossal discovery, that was to change the face of a country-side, re-model some lives, lose others, leave nothing as it had been before.

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Ogo had seen it all, must have known what it meant; nevertheless it "said nothing" to him.

It was a Stone-Age face that he turned to me, a face incredibly remote from me and my wild imaginings and pursuits, as he said, breaking the silence of a morning: "Taubada, I think maybe we get a big fig (pig) along that big pire." (fire — timber — forest.)

"We can get pigs in plenty," I told him, puffing at a welcome cigarette. "We'll shoot all you like. Going to stop here a week." For I was minded to load a carrier or two with gold; they were travelling light now, having eaten up great part of their loads. Food problems did not trouble me; as Ogo said, the place was good for game, and I judged we were in one of the numerous uninhabited districts of the inner country, where no risk was entailed by shooting.

Ogo drew at his bamboo pipe; he was happy, at ease; resting from tedious and unnecessary work; moreover, the interest of the moment had shifted to sensible subjects. . . . I watched him, as I sat perched on a rock, my face towards the long hard way by which we had climbed down, the day before, Ogo was looking up the east side of the basin, towards the ranges.

A change came over his face. It came very quickly; it seemed, in an instant, to set his features stiff, like water frozen by an icy wind. He ceased to smoke; held, for a moment, one mouthful in his cheeks, then blew it out, as something not needed any more. His eyes narrowed to strips of hard glass.

"What do you see, Ogo?" I asked him, not turning my head.

The Brooding Storm

"Taubada," he answered, sitting up on the sand. "Me see two white men, flenty New Guinea man he come."

I looked behind me now. Up the long slopes that ran to eastward. I could see nothing at first. Then I could see—some way down the sides of the basin, dark dots moving, white dots following them. They had just come out of a gully that had hidden them from us for possibly an hour or two; they were going fast, making the best of their way towards the bottom, like sugar ants raiding a bowl, and very anxious to get to the sugar as quickly as possible. It was, beyond all doubt, Spicer, Caxon, and their carriers.

When I saw them, I burst out laughing. The walls of the pit caught my voice, echoing it from side to side, and a flock of those queer, blue-eyed Papuan crows that laugh like Mephistopheles himself, picked up my merriment, and handed it on among themselves, so that by and by the Pit, and the crows, and I, among us, were filling the air with crash after crash of sardonic laughter. But the crows had the best of it. They went on long after I was done. Something seemed to have pleased the brutes. I have never liked crows. . . .

"Taubada," remarked Ogo, spitting a blood-red chew of betel-nut out of his mouth, "Thass figeon he bad-fellow figeon; he smell by-n'-by some man he die."

"You're an augur, aren't you?" I said, screwing up my eyes to watch the little, down-trickling ants of people.

"Yes," answered Ogo simply, answering the tone rather than the words, as savages do. He added, incidentally, rolling another chew: "Me savvy altogether along everything."

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"Well," I muttered to myself, "if you aren't omniscient, at any rate you and the crows can make some fair-to-middling guesses."

For when I thought of Spicer and his patron; of all that the brute must have known, and of the silence—paid silence doubtless—that he had kept; of how he had balked me once, and had just fallen short of ruining me now—well, it was not astonishing that my fingers, half consciously, crept toward my left hip and the stock of the revolver without which no wise man travels through unknown Papua.

I have said that my mind, like my body, had come to maturity on the red fields of the War. There are thousands, near my age, who will understand just what that means. The War is dead, forgotten, as are its millions of dead and forgotten fighters; but the personalities shaped by it remain. It has never been possible for me to regard killing, inevitably, as murder. When Spicer and Caxon came fairly into sight, a little later; when they were well within rifle shot, nothing restrained me from picking off the tall, fair man with the awkward tread, and ridding earth of a brute as little fit to live as Fanshawe himself had been, save the knowledge that I should certainly hang for it, and that if I hanged, I could not marry Pia Laurier.

And if you doubt this frame of mind in a civilised man, spend weeks, yourself, up country among head-hunters and cannibals, with a crew of the same for carriers; forget—as one does forget, with amazing swiftness, that anything exists anywhere else, besides black forests, tangled creepers, fierce rapids and torrents, wild boars, crocodiles, snakes, and men as savage as any of these—then tell me how you look upon your enemy, when you meet him again under

circumstances such as those that heralded the arrival of the Caxon-Spicer expedition.

Seeing them come was as nerve-racking as the well-known embarrassment of meeting an acquaintance in a long empty street, each of you watching, advancing, each of you wondering when it will be time to commence the inevitable grin. . . .

They did not hurry as I had done; they did not leap on to the gravelly flat that held more treasure than all the older gold-fields of New Guinea put together. We met at leisure in the midst of the glacis of rocks that fringed the bottom of the Pit. Caxon, a silent fellow always, nodded sidewise to me, and sat down on a rock, hands in pockets, surveying the flat with a sharp professional eye, which assuredly did not miss my pegs or my notice. Spicer came up grinning, held out his hand, and quoted fatuously, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

I think that in that moment, an ill-defined presentiment of misfortune seized me. I suppose I must have felt, vaguely that this defeated Spicer had no reasonable right to look cheerful; certainly none to crack jokes. But if I did feel anything of the sort, it was submerged by my personal dislike of Spicer himself. I found myself hating his hands, once unpleasantly white, now red in blotches, and scarred by bush travel; and his face, with the blue, heavily-lashed eyes, straight nose, Charlie Chaplin moustache, and long hard chin—a queer mingling of masculine and girlish traits. I wanted to abuse him, strike him. What I did say was only—"Haven't left many of the plums for you, I'm afraid."

"Are there plums?" he said foolishly, as if he had come up into the heart of wild New Guinea for a walk.

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His eyes were roving while he spoke; I saw them rest on my pegs, and for a moment they opened wide, and showed as many ugly things as the windows of a convict jail. It was Caxon who spoke, however.

"What does it go to the dish?" he asked. He was sitting as he always did sit, characteristically, with legs flung wide apart, and arms akimbo, soft hat pulled right into his eyes, and insolent lip stuck out. Of the few old-time miners remaining in New Guinea, I had always liked Caxon the least. I thought him to be a man battered almost out of human likeness by the hardships of an incredibly hard life; a thing without bowels. . . .

Nevertheless, I answered him. There was no use denying patent facts; and besides, I would sooner have broken the other nine commandments any day, than the false-witnessing one.

"About four to the dish," I said.

"Weights?" asked Caxon, tilting his chin a bit more. Caxon could talk with that chin, even when silent.

"Ounces," I answered him with equal brevity. Spicer let out a whinnying cackle of delight, but Caxon made no sign.

"I suppose," he said presently, "we had better have dinner.

It was three o'clock; they had—as I afterwards heard—camped part way down the crater on the previous night, and travelled since dawn. It was by a very short head that I had won.

I hadn't dined either, so we joined our messes—it would have been contrary to New Guinea bush custom to do anything else. Under my tent-fly, on my table of saplings, the food was spread; tin

and tea and biscuit, as always, and we shared it, silent, as bush folk are silent at meals, looking now and then at one another, and thinking, I daresay, pretty hard. And above us swept, amethyst, blue and grey, the circle of the wide landscape that sank down to the tiny flat. And bronze-winged hawks and horn-bills planed through the burning sky; and there was a smell of hot stones in the sun, and a clinking noise of bell-birds somewhere near, as if strange gnomes were at work with invisible hammers, mining the gold that no man in all the ages of New Guinea had ever seen, ever touched, till I saw and touched it, and shed my blood upon it, that morning. And while we ate and drank, and watched each other slyly from under our eyelids, there was just one thought in the minds of every one—"Gold!" But not very far from it, I think, was the thought of the other thing that maddens, too, when seen; that cries out, too, when flung upon the ground—blood. . . .

This treasure-house of Tatatata was unlike anything else ever found in New Guinea, in that it had no room for free enterprise. All the other fields—the Yodda, the Aikora, the Keveri, the St. Aignan, the Lakekamu, the Waria, the Woodlark—were big, almost indefinite in extent. If a man could not stake his claim on one creek, he could go out and find another, maybe better. If a rich "jeweller's shop" was all taken up there would probably be something as good to be found not far away. A prospector could take his boys and his tools and dynamite miles up into the neighbouring bush, back his own opinion, and justify it, perhaps, with a take of some few hundred ounces, coarse or fine, all worth in the neighbourhood of four pounds an ounce. Here it was different. You might no doubt go

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prospecting among the hills with fair chance of an ordinary success; but no one was likely to relish that, with the washings of half a dozen fields all concentrated into one marvellous natural sluice-box, ready for the taking.

It was, in fine, a meal for only one; but a royal meal at that. And Spicer's expedition had missed it, by a day.

"Better be careful of 'accidents' in the bush," I thought, even as I pressed the two to share my food. "It's a big strain on any man's self-restraint. Nothing open, of course—I'd respect that—but so many little sneaky ways of killing are possible. . . ."

"What kept you back on the road?" I asked the two. I wanted to know; besides, this silence was irritating me. They looked so well pleased with themselves; had so little right to be pleased. . . .

"Foolery," answered Caxon, his mouth choked by biscuit. "Spicer here won't realise that I'm leader, and——"

"Quite incorrect," bleated Spicer, in what I fancy he took to be an "Oxford accent". "At the death of Sir Richard, the leadership devolved on me. We had been disappointed—sadly disappointed—in one or two people who had intended to join us; put in capital and all that—it became impossible to do as we had intended, cross the country and open up the districts that you people have so sadly——"

"Cut it out," said Caxon. "We've done more than the like of you could do in a hundred years. This man," he continued, "has had to be led by the hand through every puddle on the way; he cried when it rained——"

"I did not, damn you," was Spicer's reply.

"Morally speaking," went on Caxon, "you did. You yelped the whole trip. Now go on."

"I decided," said Spicer, with a nasty glance at the other, "That the interests of the Empiah would best be served by opening up what we had been led to understand was a probable goldfield of the very——"

"You were out for cash to go on the spree, same as myself," commented Caxon. "And if you'd fired just about two more shots into that crowd of natives we met, neither of us would ever have seen this place."

"We are too late in any case," said Spicer, in what seemed to me, oddly enough, a somewhat reproving tone. "As regards the natives, we were in frightful peril——"

"Not till you loosed off at them, and dropped a girl and a young boy——"

"I aimed——"

"Maybe, but you never hit what you aim at. You started the whole crowd on us, and then I had to shoot, and we wiped them out considerably. Of course, we had to go round after that."

"The result of your alleged leadership," patronised Spicer, "being, in sum, that we have arrived after all the valuable ground is pegged."

"Yes," said Caxon simply, and buried his face in his pint-size pannikin.

I knew the Papuan miner too well to question him. But there was something about the whole deal that I did not understand.

"It doesn't matter," I thought. "If they fancy they can out me somehow or other in the bush, they've got 'another think coming.' I've got the place in spite of them all, and I'll keep it."

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We had finished our meal now, and the two newcomers, without further parley, went down to the flat and began walking about. They had no very large area to walk in. Spicer, I saw, was for going over my claim, but Caxon spoke to him roughly (it is an appalling breach of etiquette, on any goldfield, to visit a claim unasked) and he drew back. Then they began talking. They stood with their backs turned to me; Caxon never stirred his head, but Spicer, now and then, threw a glance at me over his shoulder, showing—what I had not much doubted—that I was the subject of conversation.

It was fairly late in the afternoon by now; nevertheless, the pair started off, when they had crossed the flat, on what was evidently a brief prospecting trip. I heard the clink of Caxon's pick now and then, and the sharp tap of a hammer. I did not trouble much about them; I was too busy making use of the opportunity to wash out a few more dishes of gravel. There could be no question, now, of loading carriers with gold for the homeward trip, but I wanted, at least, a good sample.

I do not think I shall ever forget that hour—the ecstasy of washing out dish after dish, lifted almost anywhere on the flat, and finding, sure as day, at the bottom of every one, a rich sediment of yellow dust and flakes. I had prospected before; found gold before—not to my profit. I remembered the hopeless weariness of washing through an entire morning, here a dish and there another, from various parts of the ground I had selected; finding perhaps "colours" (which means a couple of minute spangles) in one dish out of twenty; calculating that, after working hard half the day, I had got about half a crown's worth.

No use dynamiting, tearing up, fluming water, placing sluice-boxes, for that. . . .

Here also there was no use in tearing up and dynamiting; no need either.

Nature, amazingly, had done the work. My claim might be the better for sluicing later on; but at the moment, one could collect enough to make any man crazy drunk with gold-lust out of the simple washing of a dozen dishes.

I washed them; collected the gold (it was about thirty-five ounces) and put it away in one of my swags, for Caxon and Spicer were now returning from what I took to be a fruitless quest, and I did not want them to see my marvellous gains. True, they knew what Tatatatata was running to the dish, but there's all the difference in the world between knowing gold is somewhere about, and actually seeing the shine of it. . . .

They came straight up to me, evidently according to a pre-conceived plan. They looked tired and dirty, discouraged, too. Caxon's chin was not so far out-thrust as usual; Spicer's mouth dragged open, and there was a nasty look about his pretty blue eyes that I had seen more than once before.

"Well, Baa-Baa," he began unpropitiously, "it seems that the only thing we can do——"

"Say that again," I interrupted, "and say it right."

"Mister Amory," he corrected, with scornful emphasis. "The only thing we can do is to peg out what's left, and go back."

"You understand the mining laws of the country," I suppose, was my answer.

"I do, if he doesn't," put in Caxon. "We're not going to visit the Mines Department this trip. The

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best thing you can do is to come back with us. You've got the loan of us over the whole business, and we'll all be safer together. That fancy shooting of Spicer's has made the bush a bit lively, I reckon."

I reflected. Caxon was undoubtedly in the right. Joining forces and carriers would be best for everyone. My boys had already shot a couple of big tusker pigs, which would help out the food question. We could travel faster together, because there would be plenty of hands to cut a road when wanted; more safely, because the natives would be slow to attack a big body of people. There was nothing that I need stay for, now that I had pegged my claim; I had only to go down to Port Moresby and get it granted.

Nevertheless, I was loath to go. Nevertheless, the blue and amethyst slopes of the great basin—so marvellous, so still, so far away from all the outer world—called me; the veiled, peering crests of the Pia Laurier Range clutched at my heart. This place was mine, in a sense beyond that of mere claim-ownership. If I had not first seen it, I had first set foot on it, discovered its treasures; it belonged to me as the maiden belongs to her first master, no matter who, beforehand, may have looked on her with desire. Pioneers, and they only, will understand, when I say that I had a passion for Tatatata; that it came monstrously hard on me to leave it—almost I had said her. . . .

Still, I had to go. The liberal mining laws of Papua would support my claim, if taken up at once; if, on the contrary, I allowed other claimants to get ahead of me in making application, my title might suffer. Caxon, of course, knew this, made the best of a bad job,

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when he invited me to travel with the party. That was how I phrased it to myself.

Yet, and yet, when the next day came; when the tents had been struck, and the carriers' loads portioned out, and the long, hard, upward tramp was beginning, I could not do away with a sense of ill-defined anxiety. On the surface everything was right. I had won the race, taken the treasure. Caxon with his callous greed, disregarding everything in life but gain; Spicer, greedy too, foolishly tricked out in Imperial thoughts of greater souls that

"Hung loose upon him, as a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief"—

were both defeated. That was well. What, then, troubled me?

As far as I could define the matter, it was this; *they did not really mind.*

Inexplicable, that. Unsatisfactory, that. Disturbing—to the pioneer instinct that senses hidden danger; feels, in the very rhythm of its pulses, coming storm, while skies are still blue, clouds still light and innocent, above.

The thought (it was not a fear, nothing so definite) stayed with me through the greater part of the trip down to the Romilly River. Nothing occurred to deepen it; nothing, on the other hand, happened to make it less. I could not help observing that my two white companions were almost nervously anxious lest I should leave their sight. If I so much as strayed away into the bush during our noonday rest, after some rare, ice-pale orchid plant that I coveted for Pia, the bear-like shuffle of Spicer would instantly disturb my solitude. If I was five minutes late for the evening meal, miscalled dinner, one of Caxon's carriers, brown,

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bare, scarce visible in the six o'clock twilight, would begin to haunt my tent-door like a ghost, and keep on haunting it till I came out. There is a streak of vanity in every man, my streak led me to conclude that the two of them valued my company—in view of the dangerous country we were traversing—more than I had supposed. Yet the puzzlement, the anxiety, were still alive, somewhere submerged in my mind. I did not altogether understand. . . .

We had now passed the safer part of the journey, the uninhabited country that lay beneath Pia Laurier Range, and were entering a district owned by the nomad tribes who had already killed Grace's partner, and several of my carriers. It was like the rest of the country, a welter of razorbacks, gorges, torrents and sheer precipice. Villages there undoubtedly were, but they were cleverly concealed for the most part; once in a way, you would see a group of brown mushrooms clinging incredibly to the scarp of some huge cliff, and realise, with wonder, that they were not fungi, but houses; houses inhabited by human creatures unpossessed of wings, who had to reach them and leave them somehow daily. There was never anyone visible about these places, even when you scanned them with a field glass. I fancy that the inhabitants saw us long before we saw them, and went, some into hiding, others into ambush, without delay.

When passing within sight of these places, we kept careful watch, and forbade the carriers to straggle. Caxon, who was endlessly troubled by Spicer's futile attempts to be regarded as "leader", had given orders that no one, white or black, should leave the main party without his knowledge. It cost me nothing to obey him; I knew that, in the Papuan bush,

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divided authority spells disaster, and, whatever opinion I might have held of Caxon in his private capacity, I knew him to be the best of bushmen. But Spicer, who was troubled at times with spasms of the sort of fools' courage that has wrecked more expeditions than fights, famine, or any other disaster, Spicer would insist on asserting himself; could not let alone any rare native we happened across; wanted to shoot him on sight, or else get into communication with him, and "baby" him with presents—anything to draw the limelight on himself, and provide material for the book of travel adventure he was hatching. Not all that Caxon could say—and he had an amazing vocabulary—nor all that either of us could threaten, kept the exponent of "Empire" from imperilling the existence of whites and natives alike, and risking the loss of the party, by sheer foolery. Spicer was not the first of his kind that Papua has known; nor, one fears, will he be the last.

On one afternoon, we had been climbing for some hours, having taken a route slightly different from that of the outward trip, and intending to cut across a ridge that both parties had previously circled from below. There were reasons with which I will not trouble anyone. This way brought us into a bit of new country; and so it was that, emerging suddenly on the top of the ridge, we came without any warning right upon one of the villages of the Tatatata tribe.

We had avoided villages up to this; the prudent explorer keeps away from Stonc-Age Papuans, if he has no urgent business with them, since contact with unknown natives spells trouble, in almost every case. But here we were taken by surprise; quite unexpectedly

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we came straight into a clearing on the top of the ridge, with a bunch of shabby huts in it, overlooking a magnificent view of forests and ranges.

The people had heard us long before; their women, pigs, babies, and collections of skulls, were no doubt already carried off into the bush. We found the men awaiting us, plucky chaps that they were—thirty or forty naked creatures decked in feathers and shells and dogs' teeth, armed with the formidable bow of the rangers, that can shoot you through at a hundred yards, and the stone club that smashes a skull as easily as a spoon smashes an egg. Not much to stand against our rifles—but they didn't know rifles; there was the trouble; and Caxon and myself were equally disinclined to stage a massacre, by way of teaching them.

Not so the wretched Spicer. With his book, no doubt, well to the fore in what he called his mind, and some stage idea of himself as a mighty hero urging him on, he seized his rifle, and, before either of us could stop him, had pumped half a dozen bullets into the crowd.

The star-shell of profanity that Caxon touched off, upon this, would have done credit to Flanders—where, by the way, he had probably learned it. If Spicer couldn't hold himself, with fire-arms, Caxon could and did. But the time had passed for that. One man had fallen—I remember thinking, in the middle of all the mess, that Spicer was the rottenest shot I had ever seen—and the rest, hoo-hooing, as headhunters do, were right on the top of us.

You could not blame them. They were defending their homes and their women from incredible white monsters, who had made the first attack; if we had

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avoided the village, there would have been no trouble, so I remember thinking at the time. But there was not much chance for thought; we had all we could do, in the next few minutes, to keep our skulls from being smashed by stone clubs, and our bodies spitted by the effective broad-blade arrow used for infighting. Travel in Papua teaches you a respect for arrows; you begin to understand things about Crecy and Agincourt that may have puzzled you before. . . .

There can be only one end to such a fight. Spicer's carriers fairly ran amuck; mine followed them, and though Caxon and I tried our best to hold the brutes (as well as we could, while defending ourselves) they made a shambles of the village square in about six minutes. Almost all that were left of the tribe bolted in the bush, and the carriers pursued, hoo-hooing in triumph. There is nobody braver than your Papuan when upheld by superiority of arms.

I have said that almost all left. One remained; a huge, powerful fellow, with fiery sunken eyes like a gorilla's, and arms that could have hugged a bear. He had singled our Spicer from the beginning, but a mass of blood-drunk carriers, clubbing and shooting, got between them, and the chief (such I think he was) could not break through. With half an eye and a fragment of my mind, I had somehow, in the midst of my own troubles, noticed Spicer; he seemed to have exhausted his magazine, without attempting to re-load, and was trying furiously to back away, covered by the carriers.

I didn't notice him again until the carriers had charged out of the village. Then something happened, and happened so quickly that I hadn't time to realise it before it was done.

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The big chief, who had been biding his time, made a leap half across the village square, caught Spicer in his gorilla-like arms, and sprang with him right over the precipice. Caxon, still spouting the eloquence of Flanders and Sari-Bair, followed as fast as he could, but wasn't fast enough. He stood hanging over the edge, alternately cursing Spicer and the chief. I gathered from a few red-hot sentences, that the black gorilla was one of the party into which Spicer had foolishly fired, some days earlier; that the whole trouble which beset us was due to his earlier folly. This explained what had been puzzling me—the reason for the ambush that the tribe had sprung on us; it would have been more natural for them to clear out when they saw us coming. I hadn't time to think about that, however, nor time to think about anything, save one fact which blazoned itself on my mind—that a white man captured alive by a New Guinea tribe, is very much worse than dead. And as the chief had done, I jumped clear over the precipice. . . .

I heard Caxon shout as I went; no doubt he thought I had suddenly gone mad. Perhaps there was a little madness in the act, because I could not be quite sure that I should light where I reckoned the chief had lighted—on some safe, unseen ledge. And indeed, I was very near toppling down the rocky face of the mountain after all. I saw the ledge as I leaped, managed to hit it, and then, having bootsoles instead of bare prehensile feet to hold on with, I lost footing, I bumped down on my back, and saw, for one unpleasant moment, a whole blue country side spread out between my sprawling thighs.

It was touch and go, but I did not go that time. I got one elbow round a stone, clasped a projecting

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root with the other hand, and managed to wriggle back to safety. The chief had disappeared. I made after him, round the corner of the cliff. I did not look down; the path was not as wide as a book-cover, and that blue, spreading country below, with its long rivercourses of silver, was much too clearly visible, whether you looked for it or not. I came on the chief in a few moments. He had turned the corner of the cliff as neatly as a man takes a loaded lorry round a bend; he was carrying Spicer, with due regard to the law of centrifugal force, well on the outside, so that the luckless fellow's legs hung out over nothing at all. Spicer wasn't insensible, I judged, but he was limp and powerless with sheer fright.

There was no way of getting him unless one risked his life first; so, remembering what was likely to happen to him if the chief got away with him, I toppled that worthy over with a shot right into the back from my 45 Colt, and "stood by" to grab. . . .

It was a near thing; so near that I used to wake up in the night and remember it, afterwards. The chief went down with a yell that was like the long screech of a train going into a tunnel. I never heard him crash. I had seized Spicer's legs almost as I fired, but he went over the cliff, too, and if I had not dropped into a sitting position and, luckily, jammed one foot against a stone, I should have gone after. As it was, I had to hold up his entire weight until Caxon (who had been scrambling and cursing all this time, trying to get down the cliff face) managed to reach us, and take hold. I was pretty nearly done then.

Between us we got him up, and bullied and shoved him, somehow, on to level ground. He was as limp

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as two yards of tripe (Caxon's happy phrase) and barely able to speak. We gave him whisky, and started collecting the carriers. We were off the line of the village by now; nothing more was seen of the tribe who had ambushed us. Two carriers had been clubbed, and a third damaged. We had to carry him, hoping he might recover. . . .

Again Tatatatata had drawn blood. . . .

On the road once more, I forgot the whole business. It seemed that Caxon did not, however. When we were camped that night, he got me away from Spicer (who seemed to like me rather less than he had done before, on account of that morning's business) and spoke as I had not expected to hear him speak. I have said that Caxon was hard. So he was, hard as one of his own pick-heads, and unscrupulous as a village dog. But he seemed to think, absurdly, that my hurried dive of the morning and my rescue of Spicer, were something to be praised; he seemed to want—inexplicably—to make up for it, reward it. He was hampered, to no small degree, by the tactiturn habit of his mind; nevertheless, he got out a sort of speech. "That was bonzer, what you did," he said; looked for a word, and failing to find it, repeated. "Bonzer. I couldn't have." Then he fell silent, and his hands dangled, loose at his sides; he looked at them as if they didn't belong to him, before he went on. "I tell you. Clear out. You clear out."

"What?"

"I can't go back on my mates. But—clear out."

I looked at him, puzzled. Was he trying to win the race into Port Moresby, get first with an application to the "Mines"? Was it a trick? Caxon was notoriously tricky. Or—what was it?

He saw my doubt, seemed to lose his temper about it. "I've warned you," he snapped. "I'll say one more thing, because . . . it was bonzer. . . . Take another road. Get to Daru. Get across to The Island. Clear. There are countries— You're not believing me. Well, go your own way. Go to hell." He added a few embroiders, and stalked off. He seemed to be annoyed with himself.

I gave the matter little thought. If I had considered it, had acted otherwise than I did, the course of two lives certainly, three or four possibly, would have been changed. But what is to be, will be. I went on.

I don't know how many days we took on the downward journey. We were quicker, of course, than we had been, going up; but it seemed a very long time to me. I wanted to reach the river. I wanted to find a boat, get down the coast to Port Moresby, feel the stones of the Lands and Mines Office hill under my feet, see, at last, my left hand holding down the neat black and white print of an application form, while I filled in, with the right, the words that would make me master of more gold, more fortune, than any man in New Guinea had ever dreamed of. I dreamed of it, now, daylong and nightlong; of the far, blue basin of Tatatata, of the wonderful sands silted into its bottom, of the gold they held, and all that the gold would buy. . . .

So we came back to the Romilly River, we crashed through the last of the Liomas; we left the heat and heavy smell of the bush, and came into the fresh scents of flowing water, and the sweep of the river wind. Before us showed the green, marshy bank, and on the bank, a little group of tents, white, ridged, with separate flies—Government tents.

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There were white people near the tents; I did not look at them, or even wonder who they were, for, unbelievably, I saw a woman's figure detach itself from the group, and move towards me; I heard it speak my name—and it was Pia.

CHAPTER XI

THE RECKONING

I SUPPOSE that the appearance of Pia, there on the Romilly River far from civilisation, when I had thought her safe with her parents by this time, might well have astonished me, started me guessing and wondering. It did not—at first. Nothing on earth seemed so natural and right as that she should be there; should be anywhere where I was. She was my mate, she only, out of all the women in the world, all whom I had known, all whom I had not known. This was as plain to me as the swing of the sun from east to west. The rest of it followed.

She was wearing an exceedingly pretty white frock and a wide white hat, that made her eyes look bluer than ever. Everything she wore was white. I noticed that, and was rather surprised that she did not wear some kind of sporting dress, here in the wilds; but all she did, in my eyes, was necessarily appropriate and right." Some way apart from the others she stood, on a clear space of marshy grass; it came to me that she had something private to say. I walked towards her; and stopped. I remember the very look of the black mud and the poisonous green grass, the battens of fallen sago leaf, long and brown, beneath the small toes of her white shoes, and the heavy bulk of my own nailed Bluchers, as we stood; I can recall the wimpling

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sound of the Romilly waters against the anchored launch; smell the smoke of the camp fires, see the little group of white men standing ceremoniously apart. I remember that I was just beginning to feel a certain uneasiness, that struggled for supremacy against the mastering joy of her presence; her face, when I saw it near, seemed unusually grave. . . . Then I caught her hands, and held them for an endless minute, and I was sure that the trouble did not matter, whatever it was, because it had left her alive, and myself alive, and both of us together.

"Phil," she said with curt directness, as if seconds, minutes, were counted. "Will you do something for me?"

"Do you think you need ask?"

"Maybe. . . . I want you to make a blindfold promise, and you won't like that. I want you to promise you'll ask no questions."

I did not like it. Still, I answered: "I'll promise anything you choose, and ask nothing."

"Then, Phil, I want you to marry me—now."

The promise held—as a heel-rope holds a horse, that would break away, if only it dared. A hundred questions were in my eyes, I have no doubt; I have no doubt either that the whole hundred were drowned, swept out of sight, in the tide of fierce triumph that caught me when I realised that Pia was to be mine, to-day.

She read me. "There's a missionary with us," she said. "Mr. Gartney. He's coming now. He'll marry us, but—I can't—go with you."

"Go with me? I've come back!" I had her hand; I held it as if never, in life or death, I meant to let it go again.

"Yes," she said, her eyes looking at me and through me, in the same moment, as though she saw something very far beyond. "Yes, but it's good-bye, all the same. You promised, Phil!"

"I'll ask nothing," I told her. But I kept that slim brown hand in mine, and I never let it go until the Reverend Mr. Gartney, and his two witnesses—the launch engineer and a stray trader who was travelling with them—had done with her, and with me; until my seal ring was on her marriage finger, and my name, the Black Sheep's name, was hers till death should part us. Then I let go, to place my arms about her, and before any and every creature who might be looking on, to kiss my wife.

She did not kiss me back; almost she seemed to shiver a little, as if with cold. I loosed her, looked round, and saw that my friend Bassett was there. I had noticed him on the river bank, some minutes earlier, but he hadn't seemed to matter. . . .

With his tall rifle-armed police boys, he was walking towards us across the marshy grass; had reached us; was looking at me; was speaking.

"Amory," he said. "I'm sorry to say I have orders to arrest you for the alleged murder of Sir Richard Fanshawe."

I turned not to him, but to Pia. In one moment, I understood all. She, the fearless rider, the candid lover, had dared one more risk. She had tricked me into doing that which never, knowingly, I would have done—link my life with hers, beneath the shadow of crime and death. The words were said; there was no unsaying them. Pia was married to an arrested murderer.

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"Anything you say," warned Bassett, "may be used in evidence against you."

I paid no more attention to him than to the winds of the Romilly River. I faced my five minutes' wife, squarely looking her in the eyes. "You should not have done it," I said. Pia looked back at me, and her eyes did not fall before mine, in that duel. "It's my answer to you," she said. "I know about everything."

"That you don't——" I was beginning, but Bassett cut me short.

"She does," he said. "I told her."

"You told——"

"Yes."

"What damned reason had you to——"

Said Bassett in his precise manner; "You don't seem to realise that you have no private affairs left. In any case, all this is very irregular. I must ask you to come with me and the police, Amory. I'm sure you won't make trouble."

"I won't," I answered him. "Give me five minutes talk first."

He went away, remaining in sight. I turned to Pia. "What is it that you know?" I asked her. I could not believe the whole wretched story was out at last, or that she would dare to tell it if it were.

But the white fire of my wife's spirit dared anything. "I know," she said calmly, "that Richard was a leper——"

"Not proved."

"Suspected, at all events. I know you met him and told him you'd recognised him. And he said he did not care. And he was going to the mainland for the wedding. And you shot him, because you could

not stop him any other way. You knew you might be hanged for it——”

“Dear love, it’s not might; it’s will be.”

“I don’t believe it. But if you are, I’ll go with you to prison, and I’ll walk with you to the end, and I’ll kiss you before you die—like this.”

I met her lips before they had time to reach mine; and we clung together caring nothing for the men on the river bank, caring nothing for who saw us, in an embrace fierce, long as if indeed the shadow of the gallows tree rose above us, ready to end all.

She drew back; the little feet that I had swept up away from earth, in the long passion of my kiss, came down again with their white wedding shoes splashing in the mud. “They’ll take you in the Government launch,” she said. “The *Papuan Chief* is down the river a little way, waiting for me.”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to Port Moresby. I never went away—so many things began to happen. Mr. Spicer turned up—he went to Fisherman Island and questioned the old Solomon man who’s caretaker——”

“Why, I never saw——”

“No. But it seems he was hidden away somewhere, afraid to show. Mr. Spicer got it out of him. He—Mr. Spicer—knew all sorts of things—I can’t think——”

“I can,” I said, remembering that night on Daru, and the meeting with Spicer, outside Bassett’s house.

“He set all this going, before he and the other man started up country after you. He must have known they’d be waiting for you here.”

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All that had puzzled me, all I had felt and feared, was plain to me now—too late. Well might they take their defeat lightly, when it meant so little! Well might they stick close on the way down to the trap that was to be sprung upon me—me, their only rival to the gold of Tatatata!

"I'm going," she said. "It has to be good-bye, as I said, but I shall be near you, all the time, and if—if——"

She could not bring forth the black words a second time. "I understand," I told her, "God's blessing on you, darling." And upon that, we parted.

Bassett was waiting. Bassett took me to the launch. It appeared that Spicer and Caxon were going by the other boat. Bassett wouldn't take them in the launch. "We shall get there first," he told me. "It may matter to you, and may not. Anyhow you shall have the chance. I suppose you got something."

I leaned to pick up my swag; opened it, and turned out a pile of coarse gold, from the bottom of a billycan. "I washed twelve dishes for that," I told him. Bassett's eyes opened wide. "What have you struck?" he asked. "Looks as if you'd been raiding a jeweller's."

"I have," I told him. "A 'Jeweller's shop'—but it isn't likely to matter particularly; if they break my neck at Koki gaol, I shan't have much time to enjoy it."

Bassett had nothing to say. I think he hated his job so much that he couldn't even be civil. I understood his frame of mind, more or less shared it, and on the run to Port Moresby, happily a brief one, we scarcely exchanged ten sentences.

On the day when we made port, the *Papuan Chief*, lagging a few miles behind us, I was given permission

to visit the Mines Office more or less in custody, and make my application. So far as precaution could do it, I was holding Tatatatata. But that my tenure was perilous, none knew better than I. Caxon and Spicer were in court during the trial, when it came on a day or two after. They watched every point with the sharpness of prosecuting attorneys. I don't know what they made of it. What I made of it, that first day, was that I was not, at all events, going to be hanged. I had a lawyer; he was doing his best, and making the most of Fanshawe's attack on me; and his attempt to run me down. I knew, of course, that that had nothing to do with the case; but I thought of Pia, waiting for news in the little house among the oleander and bauhinia trees, and held my tongue. The old Solomon Islander was chief witness. The boy I had hired in port, who cleaned my rifle and found one shot had been fired; a stray Hula native, who had been out fishing on the reef, and had seen me come away from Fisherman, make a long sweep, and return, were others. Spicer, when called, told shamelessly all that he had overheard under the house in Daru, and thereby sheeted home to me the one thing wanting—motive. I was known, of course, to be in love with Miss Laurier, but that alone would hardly have fixed the crime—if crime one must call it; I have never felt inclined to do so.

The end of it was that the jury found me guilty of manslaughter, and that I was sentenced to five years.

I am quite certain that those twelve good men and true of Port Moresby stretched a point in order to save my neck; and I am equally sure that the Judge and the Crown Prosecutor—one of whom was officially

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doing his best to have me hanged, while the other was officially ready to pronounce the sentence—were much better pleased with the verdict than they would (officially) have admitted.

I don't know that the people of Port Moresby, take them by and large, are any better or any worse than most small tropical communities; but I do know that in spite of their faults, which are pretty much mine, and in spite of their virtues, which are occasionally deadly, and are not mine at all, I love them, and always did. They are solid at heart; they'll give their last shilling to the poor chap who is "broke" and can't get away; they'll take crying sick babies into homes already crowded with children, and keep them until further orders; they'll "grubstake" a man who is trying a last chance at prospecting out-back for gold, though they may know only too well that the money is as good as lost; they'll wear patched boots and smoke trade tobacco, and pretend they "don't think lunches healthy, this hot weather," in order to keep a wife and child down south, for the north-west season; they'll stick by a mate, by a man they like through good and evil, through main range cannibal fights, and Port Moresby send-off dinners, up to the altar steps, and down to the quiet hollow among the Hanua-bada hills, where the wild hearts and the restless feet of white New Guinea folk find rest at last. . . .

They stuck by me, that day. I killed Richard Fanshawe, if ever a man killed another. But they said—the store people, and the Government people, and the planter people, who made up the twelve—that I hadn't meant to do it. So I was sent to Koki gaol, and there was no gallows built up inside the yard for me, after all. And I chose—out of a

dozen who offered—a friend to go to Tatatata, and do the work that was necessary to hold my claim for me.

I had passed some days in the gaol already, waiting for trial. Pia had been allowed to come in and see me, together with the solicitor who defended the case. But now—now that my freedom was definitely forfeited, that the paying of the long price I had incurred was fairly begun—visitors ceased. During the next three months, I might see no one, save the white gaoler and the black warders, and the prisoners, natives all of them; for that mercy, at least, I was thankful.

It was late in the year now; the dry winds were over, and the wet winds begun. The avenue of palms that leads to Koki gaol shone emerald, silver-laced, against a plum-blue plain of sea; the poinciana trees below the exercise yard were feathered in gay green, with blossoms like whole beds of scarlet geranium. From that yard, every pebble of which I was soon to know by heart, one looked down over league on league of sea, studded with islets beautiful though barren; up to the crests of near green hills, that turned, far off, to amethyst and delphinium blue. A lovely place; a place swept by fresh sea winds, and scented with jasmine and frangipanni flowers, a place where, at nights, in my small white wooden cell, with its open verandah, I could lie and look through the birdcage wires that shut me in, over plains of moonlight and of wandering, silver water—I, the wanderer, the wild bird, who must fly no more. A lovely place—a hateful place, a painted, smiling hell.

They did not consciously make it hell for me there. They were kindly cold, coldly kind, as gaol officials

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justly are. Holly, the head gaoler, with his stiff upright carriage, his immaculate white helmet and starched white suit and white boots, always fresh pipeclayed; Holly, with his sharp blue eyes, and the smile that wasn't a smile, and the voice that could rake the hide off a delinquent native prisoner—turn him, with two words, into a heap of shivering brown jelly—Holly wasn't my friend; kept me to the letter of the gaol regulations; slacked nothing that might have been slacked, allowed nothing that could be refused. I suppose he was justified. He said in my hearing that I was a bad prisoner; gave more trouble than any three whites he had ever had before. I could learn working to order; I didn't mind piling stones by myself on the new little jetty, far removed from the black criminals who were doing similar work; I made no trouble about keeping my cell tidy, didn't grumble at the plain, sufficient food. What I could not learn was to avoid "answering back"; letting my sore and angry spirit flash out in sudden fury at the least reproof. What I did not realise, for long, was that, in losing my freedom, I had also lost my rights as a human being and a man. It is so, in gaols; it must be so. There were times when I could have murdered Holly, smashed his black warders into butcher-meat. Yet there was no time—I think—when right, according to prison custom, was on my side.

This had a bad result. When the three months were out, and visitors, by law, could be permitted, I got my one hour on Sunday, once a month, and not another minute. I got my letters, monthly; always read and initialed. The letters I wrote were read and initialed also. If I could have fitted myself into the prison shape so far as to behave "decently", "civilly",

"remember I was in gaol, and not in the Hotel Australia" (Heaven knows I was admonished often enough) I might have "wangled" many a little indulgence, such as are granted to the model—usually experienced—gaol-bird.

But for Pia and for me, there were no extra visits, no unread letters. Whole blank spaces of silence descended on the gaol and its inmates, for many weeks at a time; clocks relentlessly ticked off our precious moments, when they came. Worst of all, though perfectly legal and right, was the presence of Holly at all our interviews. He read a paper, and pretended kindly enough not to be listening; but—I ask you—what is lovemaking, under such conditions?

Seeing the fragile look of the gaol, the corrugated iron walls, climbable by any active man, the absurd chicken-wire that closed in my cell verandah, I had, at first, cherished fancies wherein the ancient tale of Pyramus and Thisbe jazzed with the seventeenth-century romance of imprisoned Arabella Stuart; where chinks in walls, with lovers whispering through, midnight assignations, gaolers outwitted, high dignitaries set at nought, and love triumphant over all, rang carillons through my excited brain. To be married to the sweetest, most noble and gallant little lady in the world, and to spend one's honeymoon alone in a chicken-wired cage, with the little lady pining away in Tim Ryan's hotel, two whole miles away—impossible, unbearable.

Nevertheless, like most unbearable things, it happened. Head Gaoler Holly had no notion at all of allowing prisoners, especially refractory prisoners, to whisper sweet nothings through chinks at any hour

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of the twenty-four, even if there had been chinks in the well-supervised walls of the prison yard. Head Gaoler Holly, as instructed by the Papuan Government, paid surprise visits to the cells at night, especially mine—for which I could cheerfully have wrung his neck. If I had secreted the tin-opener, and broken out of prison with it—not a difficult thing to do at any time—Head Gaoler Holly would have had the telephone going, and the native police and the white constable out in full cry, and Black Sheep Amory caught in the law's sharp crook, and hauled back to the fold at Koki, before he had had time to realise he was away. I went into Koki Gaol determined to break out—not in the hope of complete escape, which I knew to be impossible, in a country like Papua—but in the full intention of taking, at any cost, a day, an hour, alone with Pia, and paying for it afterwards as circumstances might demand. From first to last, Head Gaoler Holly saw I got no chance.

Mrs. Head Gaoler, who lived near enough to the prison for me to see her moving about on her verandah, and for her to see Pia walking alone through the palms and poincianas to visit me, going away alone after—Mrs. Head Gaoler, being a gentle little woman, used to cry over the fate that thus parted two true lovers, and once even prevailed upon her stern partner to convey me a layer cake, stuffed at all points with cream and jam and sympathy. Which I relate, because Head Gaoler Holly, I know, repented this one weakness, and would much rather the world knew nothing about it.

But Mrs. Head Gaoler—well, I think her layer cake (I could not eat it, good as it was) may fairly rank

with the "cup of cold water" which we are told will not be forgotten.

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I pass over months—I cannot remember for certain how many; it may have been about six—and come to a day when it was visiting day, and Pia, darling, ever patient Pia, was awaiting below at the gate of the palm avenue, until the hour when she might justly climb the hill. The months had changed her, as no doubt they had changed me; but my beauty wasn't anything to boast of, so nobody need have wept over me, as I could almost have wept over her, each time I saw her anew. Always, she was a little thinner, always the lovely apple-round of her young cheek was a little more wasted, like a fruit that frosts have prematurely touched; always, the blue shadow under her blue eyes had spread, since I saw her last, and the white bones in her wrists were whiter, easier to be counted. She was gay almost merry, before me; merry with the self-mastery taught the well-bred girl, as letters and languages are taught her; she strove to put aside the weariness, loneliness, despair, that ravaged her heart, even as they ravaged mine, and show a bright face throughout our little hour. We may both have been the better for our pretences; I cannot say; I only know that they were hard to keep up.

Pia's parents, I knew, maintained a ceaseless siege of her; Mrs. Laurier had even visited Port Moresby, more or less incognito, had practically gone down on her knees to Pia, begging her, as she valued the affection of her people, her place in society, her immortal welfare (characteristically, by Mrs. Laurier, placed

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last) to leave the black sheep into whose pastures she had so unfortunately strayed, and return to her own fold. It was impossible, according to Mrs. Laurier, for the same girl to spend five years, or even four, hanging about the gates of a gaol, waiting for criminals. It would be easy—according to Mrs. Laurier—to “manage” a divorce. She was sure I wouldn’t be unreasonable. Evidence could always be arranged. And anyhow, she, and Pia’s father—who had received a simply disgraceful letter about poor Sir Richard from the young man, a letter full of indecency and lies—would not think of allowing the thing to continue.

So Mrs. Laurier. Pia in reply—but I will let her speak for herself.

“Mum almost went on her knees. I was most frightfully sorry. I petted her, and told her she mustn’t worry so; I asked her how she’d have felt if father—but that made her worse; she said I mustn’t compare him to—to—never mind.”

“I don’t,” I assured her. “There’s only one person on earth I mind, and that’s Mrs. Laurier’s daughter.” But all the same, I was sorry for my mother-in-law. According to her lights, I felt she was justified.

“She said some more about criminals. And I told her that you had made yourself a criminal for me. And she said that didn’t matter; she understood how I felt—oh, Mum isn’t half bad, when you know her—but she said the point was how would society feel? And that I was young, and didn’t know what I was giving up, and that I must, simply must, come back with her by the return *Morninda*, and that it wouldn’t be too late; I could rebuild my life; my people would stand by me. . . . She is a quite good

little mother, you know, Phil, even if—well, I told her that I was twenty-one, and had my aunt's money, and I was very sorry, but I must judge for myself. I wanted to cry, dreadfully, but I didn't; you daren't show weakness to Mum; she—she encroaches. . . . Instead, I quoted that thing from the Bible—'Whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.' I was shaking all over when I said it, Phil. It was like pronouncing vows. And Mother——"

"What did she——"

"You can't down Mum. She listened as if she had been at church, and then she said, in that clipped way of her—'Very nice, my dear; but don't forget that all that was said by Ruth to her mother-in-law, not her husband; and don't forget that by and by she married Boaz—like a shot!'"

I couldn't help myself, I laughed. And Head Gaoler Holly (sometimes that man was nearly human) got so far behind his newspaper, and cleared his throat so much and noisily that—Well, what would you have done? . . .

"You had something more to tell me," I reminded her, when the newspaper was folded again, and Holly had finished gargling with his feelings, and Pia's hat had resumed its usual, saucy angle over one eye.

"Yes," she said, suddenly grave. "I had; I should have known about it and told you before, if Mum's visit hadn't put things out so. Until she was gone, she simply absorbed me, and I didn't— Phil, I'm afraid it's something serious."

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"Is it about——"

"The gold claim—yes, it is. I made as much as I could of that to Mum, but you can't get the better of her—she shoots so straight—she went to the point more than I'd dared to do myself, and said—'All very well, and people will forgive most things to millions, but my good girl,' she said, 'do you think that gold's going to lie loose till he's ready to pick it up?' And I said, 'He's sent a friend to look after it.' And she said, 'I understand' (Mum does get to know everything) 'that a goldfield's been proclaimed, and half the bad characters of Australia are there; what do you think's going to happen to a fortune left lying loose? Don't tell me,' she said. One never does tell her, she always does the telling, and she's so right—except about you."

"She's right there, if you could see it," I told her. "Thank God you can't. But have you heard anything definite?"

"Only since she went. Yesterday. A boat came in from the West, and there were a lot of men who hadn't done well, and were going away again. But they said some had done well; and they said—I heard them; I listened like a—like a housemaid."

"What did they say?" I was prepared for misfortune now.

"They said that Smithson—the man you sent—was drinking. And somebody asked them, 'What's he drinking? Gin-slings?' And they laughed most frightfully, and I couldn't hear any more. But it sounded badly, Phil. I can't tell you how glad I was that to-day was visiting day; I thought you ought to hear it at once."

I thought so, too; her information troubled me more than I chose to say. Smithson had been working the claim satisfactorily enough. Gold in various amounts had been paid into the bank for me, my partner taking his agreed percentage. So far, so good. But the last payments had been, undoubtedly very far spaced out; and the written reports sent in from time to time were diminishing both in number and in size. They had, at first, included various bits of news about the field, which to me, in my prison silence, came pleasantly as the sound of the Romilly River running beneath its palms, and the mountain winds singing in the Pia Laurier Range. Solitude of Tatatata was solitude no longer; the unblazed track was trampled by scores of miners and hundreds of carriers; a store had been put up on the field, and another at the river mouth; men from every Australian gold-field were trying their fortune and some were making it—but no one had struck anything, no one even hoped for anything, as rich as the prospecting claim that belonged to me. "I'm sleeping right on the claim at night," Smithson had said. "I and the boys. We're doing wonderful, but we have to be careful nobody goes and jumps it on us." "The Emperor turned up here a while ago," ran another letter (I did not need a translation of that name). "What do you think, he's married Genevieve Treacher, the one they call Gin-Sling. They've got three tents for themselves, bedroom, and dining-room, and his boys is camping under the rocks. You never saw the like of it. I reckon she's too good for him. Caxon is here, too. He and the Emperor are working partners. I think they've got a decent claim, but of course nobody has anything the like of yours. God's truth, Amory, I

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get the wind up sometimes, when I think of what's in this bit of gravel; if it was on the Klondike I'd have been murdered weeks ago. Send me up a good dog if you can hear of one, they're worth a dozen sentries at night."

Then a long period of silence. Then a brief letter, mentioning the despatch of another parcel of gold, and saying little else. "The rain's come on something cruel," it ended. "I feel sometimes as if I was going out of my mind with it, and the other things. But don't you worry, I'm sticking on the job."

After that came silence again. I had not heard from Smithson for two months now. And on the top of it came Pia's news that he was drinking. . . .

Then it was that I felt, for the first time, the full weight of my chain. Something was wrong at Tatatata; I knew that as surely as if I had been there to see. The pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, so wonderfully found, was in peril. With it was imperilled all the dignity, all the serenity, of my future life; all the excuse I had for dragging Pia down to the level of a convicted felon. As her mother had truly told her, it made no difference whatever that I had become a felon for her sake; the world—her world—would forget that as surely as it would remember the stain. If no one would forget, however, much, to a very wealthy man, might be forgiven; at least, I hoped so; I had based my whole future scheme of existence on that idea. And now, Smithson, whom I had trusted as I would have trusted myself, in whose hands lay my whole fortune, was failing. And I must stay here; stay in the pebbled prison yard and the foolish chicken-wired cell; work on the jetty, walk a few yards out

and back, see the white road and the blue sea before me, and know that for nearly four years, at the very best, I could not hope to tread the one or sail the other. Not free, not free!

I think that all the sorrows of all the prisoners in the world flowed over me in that brief minute when I sat silent, under Pia's troubled eyes, trying to pull myself together and think what must be done. I was not used to working through other people's brains and eyes; getting others to take my risks or look after my interests for me. Always, decision, action, had followed on thought as sunlight follows dawn; it had been a wish and a step, a word and a blow, with me. Now, I was moving in a medium that I did not understand. Whom could I trust, since I could not act for myself, and Smithson, the trusted, was falling to the triple lure of woman, drink, and gold? How could I know that the next man I might appoint would be any better?

Truly, the shine of the gold of Tatatata grew dim, in that moment; the road of life that was to have been lit by its warm glow, turned suddenly grey and cold.

I suppose the silence that had fallen between us may have lasted a minute or so. It was broken by Head Gaoler Holly, who, with many cracklings and unfoldings of his newspaper, remarked briefly—"Time up in two minutes." And we became conscious that all we had to say must be speedily said. For two weeks I could have no letter, for a month, I could see Pia no more. If she was to do anything for me—and it was becoming plain that by nobody else could anything be done—then we must settle it at once.

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But how? The time was almost out. Head Gaoler Holly was folding up his paper, rising from his seat. Pia, her little pink hat drawn saucily sidewise over her sleek hair, her pink frock fluttering in the breeze that blew through the open room—Pia, surely the prettiest, daintiest picture that had ever brightened that sad place—was already putting up a face like a sweet pale rose, for our last kiss. I took it, I held her for a moment closer than usual, moved by some indefinable, dark presentiment. I found words, somehow, at the last moment; words hurried, tumbling over one another. "Take out a power of attorney for me," I said. "They'll let me sign it. Inquire about so-and-so, and so-and-so" (I gave her a few names) "and find which of them will take Smithson's place. He'll have to go up at once; don't wait for letters to me. Write as soon as you can. Good-bye, little love" (she was near as tall as I, but the adjective came naturally; Pia would always be "little" to anyone who loved her). "Take care——"

"Time up," said Head Gaoler Holly.

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It rained a great deal during the next few weeks; work outside was largely suspended, and odd jobs of painting, cleaning, "sailorising" generally, took up the tiresome hours. More than ever, in the absence of regular outdoor work, with its glimpses of the free wide world, did I long for letter day. But when my letter came, at last, it brought no comfort with it, rather distress and dismay. The power of attorney had come made out for Pia. I had wondered a little but signed it. And now the letter told me that Pia had gone to Tatatatata herself.

"You mustn't worry about me," she wrote. "There was nothing else to do. From all I can hear, it's a woman, and only a woman, who is wanted to look after your interests just now. I wish I could have seen you again before I leave, but it would mean too long delay. Don't worry about me; the place is well opened up, and the Warden sees that order is kept. I may be a good while; no knowing what I shall find. Good-bye, my very dearest. Give my love to the Prince if he comes along. I'm sorry I shan't be there to meet him; he is a perfect duck. They say he's going to be married now—lucky princess! But I wouldn't change my own prince for him. . . ."

I had plenty of leisure, in the too-long nights, to con over her letter again and again; try to read between the lines of it, and guess at certain things she had not openly stated. "Only a woman——" What could be meant by that? I pondered, wondered, decided that Pia must be referring, in veiled terms to her love for me, which indeed, made her an eager and energetic guardian of our fortunes. The reference to the "Prince" I understood; but it cut sharply despite that pretty saying about her "own prince", for I knew that the forth-coming visit of one of England's best loved royalties would only, for me, add to the weight of the invisible fetters I carried night and day. To know that the town was holding festival, to see, from the high, fenced yard of the gaol, mast a-flutter with flags, new archways built over roads; to hear the gun-salutes and the very cheers, and know oneself set apart from it all, not able even to stand in the crowd and send one's hat and one's heart up in a shout for old England and her Prince—this hurt my sense of Empire (which perhaps, was more real, if a bit less

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theatrical than Spicer's); made the hard state of prisoner, in anticipation somewhat harder. But I put the thought away; determined not to think about Princes and Royal visits, which could mean nothing to me. . . . If I had known!

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What follows, I gained from Pia, long after all was past.

CHAPTER XII

MEASURE OF THE MOON

NEAR sunset, Pia came to the last camping place but one, before the field of Tatatata.

The clearing was deserted; grey skeletons of tents, white circles of ashes where fires had been, alone distinguished it from any other open space in the great forest. The sun had gone behind the trees; green light still fell from above, as into a deep well-top, but at the bottom of the clearing, it was almost dark.

Pia was not alone; the Government authorities had sent with her, an escort of armed constabulary, since a certain number of these were due to go up to the field in any case. Placed in charge of an old and trustworthy sergeant, they had served and guarded her faithfully through the trip—"savages in serge", but true to their salt—and on this last night but one, they were very merry over the near fulfilment of their task. It was some credit to them, and to Sergeant Simoi, too, they felt, that they had brought the Sinabada (lady) safe through all the perils and fatigues of the wild bush, and almost reached the field. Several times along the road, the leading police, urged thereto by hurried signs from Simoi, had kicked out of sight a huddled mass of bones—spine, thighs, body and arm bones; never a skull amongst them—where some

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luckless carrier, speared or shot from the bush, had met his end. Once or twice Pia herself had paused to look at an overgrown mound with a rude cross leaning askew on it; to ask the name of the white man who lay there; how he had met his end. . . .

"I think he die of somethings," was all Simoi's answer. Why trouble the white Sinabada with tales of blackwater fever, dysentery, or death by arrow? Why tell her that not all of those graves contained heads as well as bodies? She might begin to cry, though she had been brave up till now. She might want to be taken back to Port Moresby. And he, Sergeant Simoi, was anxious to get on to Tatatata—there was plenty of pig there.

He did not encourage wandering away from the camp. The Government had "talked strong" to him, before he left, regarding the lady's safety, and all that must be done to ensure it. If anything were to happen to her, it would be he, and his police, who would probably have cause to do crying.

So, when they were putting up the tents in this last camping ground but one (the track was all marked out with halting-places now, bad spots bridged, dangerous cliffs hung with ladders of bush rope) Simoi, seeing the lady at the edge of the clearing, called out to her to be cautious.

"You no go walk-about, Sinabada," he pleaded. "S'pose you wante flower, me and police we gettem flenty. By-n'by one big bush fig he coming, he altogether kai-kai (eat) you."

"There are no pigs about, and I don't want flowers," came Pia's clear voice, just a little tired. "Thank you, Sergeant Simoi, I am only looking at that funny light in the bush."

"What-name light, Sinabada?"

"I don't know what it is. It seems like a very big tent, some way off. And I think I heard—but that's impossible."

"What-name you think you hearem?"

"Corks," replied Pia. "Corks being pulled—and singing."

"Sinabada, me think you lie," replied the Sergeant courteously using the native fashion of expressing astonishment. Then, suddenly, slapping his thigh, and leaping: "By —, Sinabada, you no lie, me hearem, too. What-fashion this?" (what does this mean?)

"We'd better go and see," said the girl.

"Me and you," declared the sergeant, "we go see. You black cows there," addressing the constables, "you lightem pire, cook some tin pish (tinned fish). I beggle-pardle, Sinabada, I walk first." He set his sturdy bulk in front, and, by the last faint glow of twilight, began cutting a path through the forest, Pia following. A few minutes later, the two came out on the edges of a second clearing; one that seemed to have been made for the sole accommodation of a great white tent that stood in the middle of it; a tent finer than most of those in use in Papuan travel; fitted with a wide sheltering fly, and a groundcloth that projected a yard beyond the door. The doorway was wide, the doorflaps were hooked back. One could see right into the tent, and the sight—for that place, and that time—was amazing.

There was a table inside, covered with a white cloth. On it were plates of food, tinned delicacies of all sorts; wild boar from the forest; wild turkey, okari nuts, mushrooms. There were glasses. There

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were bottles; among them the long-necked bottle with the golden helmet, that shouts, wherever it is seen, of money, of recklessness, of youth and gaiety and the festive spirit.

All were there. Youth and gaiety and recklessness were embodied, if ever human form expressed them, by the limber, red-headed figure of a girl, who, gaudily dressed, hung over a man lying on a cushioned deck chair. Money showed in every item of the costly outfit; and the festive spirit, if expressible by song, certainly received full impulse, for the girl, at the top of her not unmusical voice, was chanting the last revue success, while the man, an emptied glass dropping from his fingers, wailed loudly and interminably that classic of the sentimentally drunk—"Annie Laurie".

Outside, the silence, the stars, black Papua. . . .

To Pia, standing a little way off, within the shadows of the forest, the whole strange scene looked like some vivid cinema picture. Scarcely more real than a film play, too, it seemed, so reasonless, impossible, was the sight of this luxurious tent, in a place inhabited commonly by wild boars; snakes and cassowaries alone. Sergeant Simoi, staring until his treacle-brown eyes almost started from their sockets, gave forth his opinion candidly:

"I think this-one too much puri-puri (magic), Sinabada. More better you-me (we) no stop." Head-hunters, cannibals, the ambush and the spear-pit, never shook the iron nerve of the old sergeant; such things were in the day's work of any policeman. But sorcery—that was a different matter.

"No good," he added conclusively.

"Hush, sergeant," warned the girl. "I want to find out about this." For into her mind had crept a conviction, born she knew not how, warning her that this thing had to do with the object of her journey.

"Who is the white man?" she whispered. She could see his face now; he was half sitting, half lolling, on the cushioned deck chair; he had stopped his song at last, and was listening to the girl, who had started afresh, and was making the primeval forest ring to her invocation of "Barney Goo-goo, of the goo-goo, goo-goo eyes".

Simoi pulled himself together, realised that there was no sorcery here, and became at once the smart, non-commissioned officer of every day.

"I think," he said cautiously, "name belong him Si-misson."

"Simisson? Oh—Smithson! Sergeant, are you sure?"

"Me savvy. Me too much dam savvy. Bee-fore" (some time ago) him take away one girl belong my village. Fashion belong him, Sinabada." (It is his way). "Him too much likem girl, likem plenty bottle goodluck" (bottles of whisky).

"I know," said Pia musingly, "that Phil thought he was sober and reliable."

"Him all right, Sinabada, suppose nobody showem girl along him, showem goodluck along him. Suppose girl, goodluck showem this man, he 'nother kind." (Untranslatable idiom, suggesting change of character.)

"He's not the only one," commented, drily, society's pet child. "I think I know who the girl is now. I've seen her before. Only for Phil, she would be at the bottom of the sea."

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"Sinabada," advised the sergeant, "no good you pullem one man, one woman, out along salt-water. Suppose he die, he die. Suppose he no die, by-n'-by he makem bad along you. True, Sinabada."

"There's something in all superstitions," agreed Pia. "Now, Sergeant, you and I are going to talk to these people."

"Me and you, we go," answered the sergeant, swelling out his chest. Some idea of sorcery still lingered in his mind, but it was clear that duty called him to accompany the white Sinabada. Mechanically he touched the long bayonet-knife that swung in its sheath at his hip. For in-fighting, Sergeant Simoi loved the bayonet. . . .

From the gloom of the forest outside, the tent looked vivid, clear, a small brightly set stage. From the tent, the forest was nought but all—surrounding dusky sea.

To the pair within, drunkenly singing, drunkenly caressing one another, the sight of Pia in the open doorway, Pia slim, erect, rigid as a young soldier in her sporting khaki, Pia with cold accusing eyes beneath a heavy patrol helmet, came as a disturbing vision from some other world. They sprang apart, and it would be hard to say whether the man or the girl uttered the foulest words.

"You shuttem head belong you," bellowed Sergeant Simoi, enraged. "What name (why) you talk bad along my Sinabada? By-n'-by me break you froat along bayonet."

"That's enough, Sergeant," warned Pia. "Wait outside for me." She stepped into the tent, and fixed a steady accusing gaze on Smithson, who suddenly

sobered, had risen to his feet. "It's the missis, by ——" he muttered, leaning one hand on the disordered supper table, and staring under his tattered locks of hair.

"Mr. Smithson," asked Pia, with cold courtesy, "will you kindly tell me why you are not at my husband's claim?"

"Plenty of time," retorted Smithson, picking up courage, under a secret nudge from Jinny. "Going back to it when I get good and ready."

"I believe you are a goldminer. Don't you know that a claim is forfeited if left without just cause, for thirty days?"

"He don't need you to learn him," came Jinny's shrill voice. Pia did not ignore her. She turned towards Jinny, and sent her a glance, in which pity, kindness and a certain fear—the chaste woman's irrepressible fear of the unchaste—were strangely mingled. "You are Mrs. Spicer," she said. "I'm sorry to see you encouraging this man in neglect of his duty."

"Mrs. Spicer as much as Mrs. Anybody," said Jinny. "More Mrs. Spicer than you're Mrs. Amory, by all accounts." She laughed coarsely.

Pia ignored that. She was feeling for her feet in this strange medium. She remembered Jinny—remembered her well. How the girl had altered since those days on the great liner! How her beauty had coarsened, how the slim, firm graces of her dancer's figure had slackened into ugly lines! So thin was Jinny, always, that perfect condition was her only chance of grace. It had gone; the grace was going with it; youth and beauty, too soon were passing away from Genevieve Treacher. In the first moment,

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Pia could not account for so great a change. But Jinny, uncomfortable beneath that pitying gaze, seized her half-filled champagne glass, and emptied it at a gulp, hoarsely crying as she took it from her lips: "What's yours? Drink hearty, we'll soon be dead!" And Pia saw that the vice of Jinny's kind long avoided, had caught her up at last. She was indeed "drinking hearty;" now she was even well on the way to fulfil the latter half of her famous war-cry.

"Champagne for the lady," proclaimed Smithson, still not quite himself, though considerably sobered. He reached for a bottle.

"Thanks, no," fell from Pia's lips like an icicle. "You haven't told me yet, Mr. Smithson, why you come to be here. I might as well tell you that I hold my husband's power of attorney, and am going up to the field to act for him."

"I came to be here," answered Smithson, with painful effort, "Because—I came to be here." He offered this brightly, as a complete explanation.

"We're prospecting," contributed Jinny, putting down her glass, and fixing a defiant stare upon Pia. "Me and he. There's other gold besides that on Tatatata, which don't belong to my friend anyhow. As for powers of attorney," she went on, hurriedly pouring out more wine, and keeping her face turned somewhat away, "I reckon this is a free country; I reckon my friend don't have to run when anybody whistles—even Mrs.—Philip—Amory". She loaded each word with contempt. If Pia, in her presence, was shaken, somewhat, by the fear of the chaste for the unchaste, Jinny, on her part, was consumed by

the light woman's burning and perfectly genuine scorn for an innocent girl.

"Here, don't you ladies get quarrelling over me," thickly said Smithson. It was pitch dark now, moonless; in the high circle of sky above the clearing, large serene stars looked down. A long way off, miles perhaps, they could hear a cassowary thundering on its fierce drum, calling to some spurred mate as savage as itself.

"No cause for qua'ling," went on Smithson. Supporting himself by the tent poles, he had moved over towards the door; was looking owlshly, yet with a curious interest, at the velvet, star-besprinkled sky. "I came away," he said, "because this lady wanted to go and fine gold mines. I let her go fine gol' mines all alone? Naw! She and me, and the whisky and the champagne—wha's that poetry about a jug of wine and a case of whisky, and Gin-Sling singin' alongside of you? She and me—and damn the new moon."

At that, Jinny, much the soberer of the two, let out a sudden shriek, flung herself half across the tent, and slapped her fingers on Smithson's babbling mouth. "Hold your tongue, fool," she cried. To Pia. "He don't mean anything. I mean, he means that the moon makes him worse than he is. It's like that with loonies of all sorts. He gets sort of wild. You know." She had pulled herself together with marvellous completeness; was lighting and smoking a cigarette. She did not look at Pia any more. "Don't mind us," she said. "We're rough, but we're honest. Rough diamonds, me and him. You'll excuse us, please. I'll get him back to the field for you; I'm fed up with prospecting." She followed Pia's question-

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ing gaze about the tent. "He would have all this," she said. "He blued every 'weight' he had at the store on the field, to make it comfortable like. I brought the cham," she added, with Jinny's queer bursts of truthfulness. "I made love to him, and got him to come away with me, because I wanted him to work for me; you can put that in your pipe and smoke it if you like." She stood with her hands on her lean hips, staring at Pia—staring hard, as one who defies you to guess what may be hidden behind his front of impenetrable brass. Over against the silks and splendours of Jinny, and the lean defiant arms, and the face, marred but beautiful still, Pia, straight, helmeted, armed, as a young Joan of Arc, with blue, pure eyes burning in a face of mountain snow, paused, still as the night outside, her mind on full stretch over this new problem. What had the moon to do with it?

There was small chance of finding out anything, here, in this reeking tent, from the half drunk pair who were certainly not prospecting, whatever their business in the bush might be. Without a word, Pia turned and walked away, followed by the sergeant.

How cool the scented night, how divine the purity of the stars! She lingered a little on the way back to the camp. The carriers were noisy; she could hear them shouting and singing. It would be tiresome, in camp; one could not think, in the midst of such a noise. Still, the bush after dark, on the goldfields track, was no place for loitering.

How they were shouting! Dancing, too. When she came out into the open clearing, she could see,

by the light of the fires, dark forms whirling and leaping, as if possessed by demons. They made such a noise that, at first, she could not distinguish what they were singing, although some words seemed strangely familiar. Then, over the uncomprehended shouts of the Mambarê and Yassi-Yassi carriers, came loud and clear the cry of some Port Moresby boys—"Sail-O! Sail-O!"

Pia knew the custom of saluting the new moon with that cry. She glanced to westward, where the forest, sloping down, showed a wide stretch of sky. There, in the west, almost gone, hung one clear small strip of silver, like a light peeling dropped from some fairy fruit. New moon! . . .

What had those people in the tent said, about the moon? Why had Jinny Treacher struck Smithson, when he spoke of it? Why must she, Pia, know nothing about the moon—the moon which measured off months. . . .

"Oh!" It was a sudden cry. Leaping over a hundred unnoticed links, her mind had sprung to the end of the chain of thought. She knew.

Thirty days of desertion, without due and sufficient cause, made void a claim. Smithson—who couldn't resist drink or girls—was here in the forest, two days away from Tatatata, with Jinny, and Jinny's (or Spicer's) cases of champagne. There were no calendars in the bush—drinkers' memories are treacherous. If you wanted to stay away thirty days, guessing wouldn't do. But if you did not guess, if you counted by something that wouldn't drop a day here or there; if you left at new moon, and gave over your reckoning to something that was sure to come back in exactly twenty-eight days, something that every native in

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sight would hail with salutations and loud cries—then, you might be perfectly sure that you would stay away just long enough.

"Sergeant Simoi!" said Pia.

"Here—sir," snapped the sergeant, hand up.

"Go and get me one of Mr. Smithson's carriers."

"Yessir," replied Simoi, as if she had asked for a handkerchief, "I bring him dead or I bring him live, Sinabada-Sir?"

"Alive, of course; and don't let anyone see you getting him."

"Right-Sir." The sergeant melted into the bush.

It was some minutes before he returned, driving before him an extremely scared and very naked Papuan.

"Come on, you black cow," encouraged Simoi. "'Spose you no hurry up, me cut the guts out of you. You like a handcuff him, Sinabada?"

"No, certainly not. Don't frighten him. Ask him when they left the field, and be sure you get the right answer."

"Me savvy," nodded Simoi. An interchange of questions and answer followed.

"Sinabada," said the sergeant, saluting, "him say this man, this woman leavem Tatatata thass time the new moon come, bee-fore. Him leavem twel' o'clock, sun he stop-on-top."

"Is he quite certain?"

"Him say yes, savvy plenty, bee-cause all those boy he sing, he dance along new moon, firs' time he makem camp."

"Give him some tobacco, and let him go. Sergeant! Tell him not to talk about this."

"I tellem all right," proffered the sergeant, on returning. "I tellem I takem head belong him, cleanem head all same pish, smokem along pire, stickem him head up along my dubu (clubhouse), suppose himtoo much talk. . . . Sinabada!"

"Well, Sergeant?"

"Whassamasser?"

Tamer of horses is, commonly, judge of human beings. Pia looked into the face—anxious, kindly, shrewd—of the dark Kiwai sergeant, the "savage dressed in serge", and recognised a man. Simoi had sensed, without understanding, the crisis in which she found herself; was offering, blindfolded his help.

"It's this, Sergeant," she said briefly. "Mr. Smithson was left to look out after my husband's gold. If he runs away from it for one moon and two days, another man can steal it; then there is no gold for my man, no gold for me. You understand?"

"I blankywell understand, Sinabada," was the reply. "Whass you-me going to do? You-me go and kill him to-night?"

"No, that wouldn't do any good. It's not as easy as that. . . . Sergeant, do you know the way to the field—I mean, know it well?"

"I no savvy him too much, Sinabada. One carrier he savvy plenty, village belong him stop two day along bush."

"What! you've got a Tatatata man!"

"My word, yes, Sinabada. Bee-fore, him killem one white man, along Tatatata road him got to gaol along Daru; this man he good man, he savvy plenty."

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Pia had been long enough in the country to have small fear of the murderer; to know, moreover, that he might be invaluable in the present crisis.

"Get him here," she ordered.

Another wild, naked creature was herded up. This man, to all appearance as savage as the capture from Smithson's crowd, displayed, as soon as he began to speak, the educative effects of a sojourn in gaol—which, among wild Papuans, amounts to something like a university course.

"Yes," he said, in answer to the sergeant. "Me savvy load (road) too much. . . . Tatatata? To-morrow we walk, we walk strong, nother day we walk, we walk strong, night-time we sleep, morning time sun he come up big, we come up along Tatatata, sun he go down, we come along gole fiel."

"Twenty-eight days to-day," counted Pia. "Twenty-nine to-morrow. Thirty the day after. Thirty-one to arrive. . . . Sergeant! Ask him does he know another way—a shorter way."

"No savvy," said the carrier, promptly. Pia watched him; he seemed to her mind, a little too prompt.

"Offer double pay," she ordered.

"No savvy," was the result—not without a touch of temper.

Pia turned her back, and walked off to her tent. Her man, his fortune, were hanging in the balance.

The cat streak that hides in all women came to the surface. She became cruel, in defence of her own.

"Make him talk," she flung over her shoulder, as she went.

Measure of the Moon

"My word, me blanky well make him," was the sergeant's reply. He reached for a strip of lawyer cane.

It was only a minute or two before the ex-murderer appeared, sulking, shaking, whimpering, driven by Simoi. "I can't cut the guts out of him proper, Sinabada," said the sergeant, courteously, "bee-cause he make too much damnoise—don't want to bring plenty bushman along camp—all-a-same, me think he talk for you now."

Pia, sitting on her camp bed as on a bench of justice, questioned him, and the sergeant translated.

"Is there another road?"

Simoi replied. "Him say, yes. Plenty bad road, full up along devil."

"Is this road shorter?"

"Him say, suppose big rain no come, this road plenty short."

"If we left at sun-up, when could we arrive?"

"Him say, morning time nex' day."

"What happens if it rains?"

"Him say, altogether we die."

"How?"

"Plenty devil stop along this road, makem big rain come, breakem up you-me."

"Get ready to start at daylight," said Pia. "Tell him, if he shows the wrong road, and if we don't arrive as soon as he says, he'll be shot."

It was pure bluff, but she trusted to its carrying, with the aid of Sergeant Simoi.

Papuans do not wink; Simoi, however, gave the Sinabada a look that amounted to winking, as he described, in vivid language, the trouble that would await that murderer, should his guiding be poor.

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The carriers settled down to rest. Simoi rolled himself up in his blanket—mosquito nets, so high above sea-level, were not wanted—and lay down across the open end of the carriers' fly, within sight of Pia's tent. The old sergeant had acquired the art of sleeping with one eye more or less open, on march. He was dimly aware of movements in the Sinabada's quarters, of packing that went on, of a silence at last. . . . Light still burning. The Sinabada was not asleep. Simoi could not settle down until she was; he stirred on his hard couch, half dozing. Suddenly he was broad awake. There was someone outside the Sinabada's tent.

Simoi reached his arm softly down the barrel of his rifle, as it lay along his leg. He could see the person, standing in shadow; it was not a native. He rather thought it was the white man Smisson. What did he want, there at night? Still watching, the sergeant swung his legs over the end of the stick platform, and raised the rifle to his shoulder. . . . What! it was the other Sinabada, after all. Who could tell Taubadas from Sinabadas, when they both wore trousers? He had been very near firing. . . .

Crouching inside the fly, Sergeant Simoi kept watch. He did not approve of these late visitors, of whatever sex; he was here to protect his charge, and he would do it. What was the other Sinabada going into the tent for? What were they talking about?

Simoi, that man of elemental things, might have understood, had he been near enough to hear; again, he might not. The native mind is still a mystery.

Within the tent, Pia, in soldierly khaki, busy packing up her few belongings for the morrow's start, had been

suddenly confronted by a vivid figure wearing silk pyjamas, wild red-gold hair flying in curls about its face. Jinny, sobered; Jinny, in a new strange mood, was there.

"I come to hear," she said, hoarsely, "what you're going to do."

There was no chair. Pia offered her visitor part of the bed, and sat down on the other half. They were very near together now, the face that was fair, sweet, pale as a stephanotis bloom high-climbing above earth; the other, vividly coloured as some fire-hearted hibiscus that grows where every hand may pluck, close to the ground. They stared at one another, exploring each other's hearts.

"But that's what I wanted to ask you," said Pia, looking, sadly, at the flawed beauty, the wasting youth, of her who was called "Gin-Sling". "I can't think you knew what you were doing——"

"I knew blasted well. I got him away, and kept him away. It was Spicer made me; you don't know the man—he's silly on top, but underneath, he can buy and sell all the wise men. I always sort of liked him. You wouldn't understand. . . . I married him when he asked me; I think he's another wife or two knocking about somewhere, but I reckoned I'd get what I could out of him. A girl has got to live. You don't know. You don't know much—the like of you." Once more the light woman's contempt for bread-and-butter innocence flashed out. "What are you going to do?"

"What are you?"

"I don't know as that matters much to anyone, but Smithson's cut and run. He wouldn't a left me alone in the bush, not if there'd been nobody there—

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but when the drink was out of him, he got scared as to what he had done, and he says, says he, 'I'm off to-night, I'll take the outfit and go, and you can go to blazes; or to Mrs. Philip Amory,' says he, 'for you got me into this trouble', says he, 'and there isn't a miner in Papua will ever take a drink from me again, so I'd better go south and swing a blanky pick at Newcastle,' says he. And he went. He cut into the track a mile down from this, so as he wouldn't have to see you. And I got no carriers and no tent. And if you like to tell me to go to blazes, same as he done, you can do it; you've every right."

"No carriers!" Pia had learned her New Guinea by now; she understood as well as any miner or explorer, what "no carriers" in the far interior, meant. It meant death, death certain, and little delayed. If she had been inclined to cast this creature out, if she had hated her, as she well might have done, for the ruin Jinny was bringing on the man they both loved—even so, it would not have been possible to desert her. But Pia had no hate for Jinny; pity, rather held her.

"Of course, you must come with us," she said. "We're trying to get through by a short cut, in time to save the claim. My carriers think it can be done. I'm afraid we'll have to hurry you."

"You're going to— But you can't. The time's up day after to-morrow midday. And Spicer, he's waitin' there with his eyes gogglin' out, ready to put in his pegs, if someone else doesn't beat him. Smithson, he meant to go back with the boys and me, and see the fun; Spicer promised him half as much again as——as ——" her voice shook, "as Phil was allowin' him, to work it along with him. And he promised me half

of the whole thing. He thought he'd bought me soul and body for that. But I knew the minute I saw you come in that the game was up so far as I was in it. I was shickered, and when I'm shickered I'm half mad, but all the same I knew when I'd sobered down a bit, I'd be off the whole thing. I'm like that. I'm on, and I'm off, and when I'm on there's nobody can put me off, and when I'm off the devil himself can't put me on. I'm through with Spicer and with Smithson, and with the whole damn crew, and I wish to God I'd never done it, only it's too late now."

"It's not too late. If we start just at dawn, and keep going hard, we can get there before midday the day after to-morrow. And we're going to do it."

"You're going to stop him?" cried Jinny, springing to her feet. She seemed to fill the little tent with her height, her hair, the blazing silk of her sleeping suit. Pia, sober, dusty-coloured dove, looked at this wild bird-of-paradise, with a certain touch of apprehension. How rely on anything so temperamental, so changeable? What side, even at this moment, was she taking?

Jinny left her not long in doubt. "I'd give the heart out of my body," she said, "to see him turned down proper. He's—he's made me hate meself. I've done things that all the pussy cats meow at, but I never done a dirty turn to anyone before, and it's owin' to Spicer that I've done it now. If you do know another way we can get back by, for God's sake take it, and I'll know what it is to sleep o'nights again. It was when I heard from Port that he'd married you—Phil, I mean—it was then I went off me nut, and Spicer, he took advantage of it. I'm with you, there's my hand on it." She struck her thin fingers almost painfully

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into Pia's. "Have you got anything to drink?" she finished with sudden pathos.

"I have one bottle of brandy in the medicine chest," answered Pia.

"I'll make it do," said, briefly, Gin-Sling. "We'll get there, or we'll die."

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CHAPTER XIII

THROUGH THE CANYON

IN the bottom of the river gorge, it was extraordinarily still. The thin tinkle of the Romilly River among high boulders, parched with drought, seemed only to emphasise the absence of all other sound. Far away among the castellated heights that blackened the stars, rock wallabies may have moved with loping thump, winds stirred in wild grasses, the stately cassowary sounded his loud drum. But here at the bottom of all things, in the great crack that seemed to cleave the very bowels of earth, there was no life, save that made for one night by the carriers, the camp fires, the moving forms and shouting voices of Pia's expedition. When these died down, when suppers were over, and hacking tomahawks silent; when the natives were sleeping under their flies, and the two white women had come out to sit for a few minutes under cool sky, before they got beneath their close mosquito nets and went to rest—then, the stillness of the deep valley came forth once more in a slow flood; wrapped all things, seemed to climb higher and higher up the bare stone walls, above the low, exhausted river that was breathing feebly in the heart of it, as life, leaving the body of a man, breathes ever more and more faintly through the rising tides of death.

It had been a hard day for both women, forced to drive strength and endurance to the utmost behind

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the greater and more enduring strength of the men; but—strangely—it had not been as hard as either had anticipated. Pia was almost puzzled to find the whole party so near, by all accounts, to Tatatata. Simoi had assured them that the rocky heights to the left of the canyon in which they were camped, were the last rise before the downfall of the Pit. True, those heights were a good thousand feet above the river; but there seemed no reason why the party should not climb them easily enough, get down the slopes of Tatatata in the early hours of day, and reach the field in good time. They had travelled up the canyon without much trouble, and reached a good camp well before dusk. It was too easy, as roads went in that wilderness; and in consequence, it gave Pia to think. There was no going back; she had wanted that road, and taken it—but why was the carrier so strongly averse to using it, and why would Sergeant Simoi, when questioned, say nothing about the matter? By all showing, this way saved a whole day of travel. And yet so far, it had been neglected by the makers of the track.

"I wish," said Pia suddenly, "I knew more about this country."

Jinny was sitting on another rock, near by. Her long figure, feet up, hands clasped about bent knees, made a pale hump against the darkness of the rocky walls. There was a faint smell of flowing water and wet stones; the cookboys had been using some kind of bastard sandalwood for fires, and the air was perfumed with its smoke. A long way off, among the peaks of the Pia Laurier Range, distant thunder broke, grumbled, and was still.

In the silence that followed on the thunder peal, Jinny spoke.

Through the Canyon

"I know something about it," she said. "I've been munced on the field. I reckon it's floods is the matter here."

"Floods?" said Pia, swinging round on her stony perch, to look up and down the enormous gorge.

"You told me the carrier said the place was full of devils, and when it rained the devils came along and broke you up. That means you'd die."

"I supposed it might be very inconvenient," said Pia, "Sergeant Simoi did mention something about it; but—die! I really don't see why one could not get out of the way, if a flood came. One has only to climb up the sides before it has risen too high."

"There's places you couldn't climb."

"Well, then, one could hurry along, and find another place."

"If you'd time."

"Why shouldn't you have time?"

Jinny was silent for a moment. "I've heard stories," she said presently. "Likely they wasn't true. I'm going to bed."

Pia sat a little longer, out there alone in the blackness of the canyon, looking up at the river of stars that ran so far above. A certain obscure instinct of physical repulsion kept her from the joint sleeping place; made her feel, as she had secretly felt last night, that a twelve by fourteen tent was too small for her and for Genevieve Treacher, together. But her innate courtesy made her hide the feeling.

"I'll come presently," she called. "It's so cool out here."

Jinny made no answer; she was flinging her clothes recklessly about in the tent, and Pia could hear her muttering to herself.

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"Has she been drinking again?" wondered the girl on the rock. "It's a terrible pity. She could be so fine . . . she might even yet. But if *that* has got her, her time will be too short. How long," she wondered, with a certain fearful curiosity, "would it take a woman like her to reform, change entirely, make up for it all?"

Life had no answer ready to offer Pia Laurier . . . that night.

By and by, when Jinny's mutterings and flingings had given way to silence, the other entered the tent; sat down on the edge of her bed, and began to unwind puttees and unlace boots. She felt that sharp eyes were watching her from behind the mosquito net of the other bed, but she tried to remain, or look, unconscious of the fact.

Without warning Jinny burst out: "I hate you; I think I'm mad."

"She has not been drinking," thought Pia.

"I duno what I'm doing it for," went on Jinny, speaking more and more rapidly. "Why should I? Why should I hand you over to him, and fill the pockets of both of you, when I could knock you over any one of them precipices, or I could set the carriers on to take your head—oh, you don't know; there's nothing any man, black or white won't do for me—except one—except——" The threatened storm burst; she fell into frantic tears.

Pia acted by instinct now. Her repulsion, somehow, had died.

"Jinny," she said, "Stop crying, dear. It hurts you to cry like that, and it hurts me to hear you."

"Why should I stop? Why shouldn't I get them

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to kill you and your sergeant, 'too? For two pins I would. You took Phil away from me."

"No," said Pia calmly. "I did not. That was done long before either of us met him. Can't we be generous to each other, Jinny, since we both care for him? Can't we want the best for him? I've thought, often that you might have been the best, if—you and he had met earlier."

"Say it out. I know what you mean."

"If you know, I needn't say. Jinny, I can't give him quite what you might have given. It's a puzzling world; things don't ever fit neatly, as they do in books. There's something about me that's not—not——"

"I know. It's like them mountains that he called after you. Ever so often, on the field, I'd used to look at them, at sun-up; there they was, the Pia Lauriers, high up and cold, with the light on them, and you'd see them for a little while, all gold, and then, when the sun was gettin' warm, and they looked sort of home-like, and not so far away, the mists would come up like cloaks, nuns' white cloaks, hidin' them, and they was gone."

The tears were near Pia's eyes. "Why, you're a poet," she said, lightly, to hide her emotion. "I'm not; I'm not even musical. . . . It's what I said; you have so much that I haven't, and there are things he'll miss. But Jinny, we've got to remember that we love him, and want to do the best for him, and he would just hate it if we couldn't be friends."

"You mean you'll be my friend—real dinkum—no nonsense about doin' me good and improvin' me and gettin' me into 'a nice place where they'd be kind to me'?"

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"I want to be your friend just as one girl to another. If I may."

"If you may!" said Jinny, and flung her arms about the other's neck.

Pia's kiss, given without reserve, was still on her lips, when Jinny, without warning, sprang away; leaped to her feet, listened a moment, and then, in frantic hurry, began to put on her clothes.

"What's the matter?" asked Pia.

"Matter? Hark at that!"

"I hear nothing."

"Nothing, hell! That's rain."

A sudden memory leaped into Pia's mind—

"What happens if it rains?"

"Him say, altogether we die."

She did not quite understand—yet. But she ran out of the tent, and under the few faint drops that were beginning to fall, looked up and down the gorge. There was almost nothing to see; just the bright stream of stars high overhead, the crenellated walls of the gorge enclosing it, and the pale shadows, near at hand, of three or four tent-flies. Camp had been made on a slope of barren sand and gravel at the bottom of a rock wall. There was driftwood there, and plenty of water, and, when they had halted, just before dark, it had been impossible to see any better place behind them or ahead. All the gorge, for miles, was steep-to, with a bottom almost level, that made good going, in spite of boulders and moraines of loose stone. The thread of water that here represented the Romilly had not seemed—then—of any importance.

But already that thread was making its import felt; already a small, growing voice was audible among the boulders; tinkle and tripping of water, that came from

somewhere far away. The carriers had not heard it—they slept as only savages can sleep. Simoi had heard; already he was up, out of his tent, and running round among the other tent-flies with a stick in one hand and a lantern in the other. "Get up, you ——'s," they heard him shout; he wielded his stick with a powerful arm, and many a carrier woke shrieking under his blows. He tumbled them out; he did not waste time on Pia and Jinny, seeing them already up and dressed. Lanterns were hurriedly lit all over the camp. The rain was not yet heavy, but it was increasing, in the slow steady fashion that presages a downpour.

"Leavem altogether you load, get down along creek blanky quick," shouted the sergeant. "We go back."

"What is it?" asked Pia, as he came running up to her tent.

"Rain," answered the sergeant. "He fullem up this place quick time. You get down along creek, you two-fellow Sinabada, you run like hell."

"Where to?" demanded Pia, coolly.

"I show you. You go firs', lightem torch." He was away again, driving the boys like cattle. Some of them wanted to collect their little belongings, their betel-bags, their pipes, their blankets. . . . Simoi cracked them over the head, over the legs, hustled them without mercy. "You want to die here, you blanky black swine?" he shouted. "Get on."

The Tatata boy had already vanished into the darkness behind the camp. He needed no one to tell him what was coming. Through a raffle of rocks, Pia and Jinny hurried, backwards along the way by which they had travelled earlier in the day.

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"He knows some place we can get up. It must be pretty near," gasped Jinny, as they pressed forward. Running was impossible, walking not easy. One had to balance and scramble. Pia nodded, saving her breath. In the minds of both was the thought—"It may not be near enough." Simoi, according to his lights, had acted wisely; he had pitched camp in the one place where there was driftwood for fires, and standing ground for tents; he had left behind him a way out, in case of necessity. . . . Doubtless the proper place for ascending to the heights above was on ahead, too far to reach in the dark. Doubtless one could have got back to the other way out, in the face of any ordinary rainburst. But—was this ordinary?

In the minds of both women there was a fear that it was nothing of the kind. Where they were, the rain was now heavy, hissing on the stones, thrashing the bent shoulders of the two girls; the thread of water in the river bed was rising, so that they had to walk knee deep in many places. But that was not all; that was by no means all. Behind them, chasing, threatening, thundering, like some colossal "dragon of the prime" in search of prey came something infinitely worse. They could hear it more distinctly with every minute. It was not like a dragon now; it was like a railway train running away; like three trains; ten trains, roaring through one tunnel all together. And they were like people trapped in a tunnel, who couldn't find the refuges in the walls. In truth, the walls of the Romilly canyon were as much a trap as any tunnel; and Jinny, at least, well knew that, between those walls, you might be beaten and battered to fragments by the thing that was coming,

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just as you might be battered under the furious wheels of a train.

The darkness and the rain were terrible. The torch was a mockery. "To be drowned in the dark!" thought Pia, sliding over boulders, splashing in and out of pools that deepened with every minute. Then—"Oh, sweetheart, will you ever know?" Then, as she struggled through water nearing her waist, staggered against the clawing current, felt that the end of the fight was very near, came thoughts that she had never told to any; broken and breathless prayers that remain between Pia and her God.

And still, in the roaring darkness, in the rising water, the tiny ray of the torch showed no sign of Sergeant Simoi.

A gust of wind came suddenly, sweeping the canyon; she did not need Jinny's clutching hand, Jinny's half-heard shout, to know that it was the outrider of the flood . . . the end.

They flung themselves against the merciless rock wall. For the last time, Pia's torch swept up the dark. She saw—they both saw—a rope dangling down the wall. Through the shout of the coming flood, pierced Sergeant Simoi's bull-voice from up above—"Takem rope!"

He had found some all but impossible place of ascent, torn a liana from one of the trees that clung to the slope above the rocky wall, and was flinging it down to the "two-fellow Sinabada".

The wall sloped outwards. The rope, seen in the stream of torchlight, was very long. In a single tense instant, both girls realised that only one could be saved, and each, in the same moment, determined that it should be the other.

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But Jinny, Jinny the gipsy, the dancer, unstable in all things, swift in all things, was in that last moment, swift to seize and hold the glorious chance of death. While Pia, more deliberate, cooler, was endeavouring to force the rope into the other's hands; while the wall of water and tumbling rock, before which no human thing could live, was sweeping down upon the two, Jinny, crying, "Take him that!" kissed Pia, and flung herself into the flood.

There was but a second left. The rope swung Pia, clear of the roaring Romilly, just in time.

Above—Sergeant Simoi and the greater part of the carriers (some had been swept away, but some had followed the Tatatata boy, and climbed safely out), pulled heartily, landing, in a few minutes, one white Sinabada, who, strange to say, wept and cried at being rescued. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

DAWN AT TATATATA

THE sun was climbing high above the proclaimed goldfield of Tatatata, now changed indeed from the lonely basin that had held all its treasures untouched for so long. Light blazed from the intolerable silver of tinned roofs, clustered low down in the valley—magistrate's house; licensed "hotel", store; small field hospital. Light danced on running water that was led from springs higher up, and flumed into the various claims, dotting the whole extent of the basin—the basin that was gold bearing almost everywhere, but, nowhere, carried anything to touch the wealth accumulated in one prospecting claim at the very bottom. On new clean tents, on old soiled tents, on "bush" huts made of sago and black palm, the sun struck fiercely, making every place it touched white-hot; for it was growing now towards noon, and in the low latitude of Tatatata, midday found no coolness, almost no shadow, anywhere.

Near the bottom of the pit, above the small flat that held the prospecting-claim, were gathered the strangest group that perhaps had ever been seen in that country of strange happenings, Papua. It was far inland, days and days from the sea; but here, on a big flat rock, as on the deck of a ship, stood together a number of men, watching with the utmost attention

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two who held chronometers and sextants, and were apparently waiting for twelve o'clock to take an observation of the sun.

These were old sailors, of whom every goldfield holds a few. They had held on to their "instruments" as a mate or a master will, so long as he can keep himself and his goods away from the pawnbroker. The field had found them out, and, urged by one Spicer and his mate Caxon, who held the ground nearest to the coveted prospecting claim at the bottom, had got them down here towards noon on the thirtieth day of Smithson's absence from Tatatata. Nothing was to be done illegally. As soon as the thirty days were up, and not one second before, the goldfield at large would compete for the possession of that treasure-hole at the bottom; would place its pegs all over the coveted ground. Spicer and Caxon, it was well known would run the best chance. They had been careful to take up much less than their legal share, but to place their ground—being almost first in the field—all round the prospecting claim. On this account, they were sure to be the first who would strike in the pegs, since goldfields custom forbids trespassing. "Give us our bite at it," Caxon had asked the others, "and we'll stand aside to let the rest of you in right after." The miners had agreed; there was nothing to be gained by rushing, for Caxon and Spicer, having no prospector's claim, could take up only two full claims between them, though they might, and would, pick the best bits. What was left—twenty nine claims—would be well worth getting; worth fighting for, if fighting had to be done. The Warden and Magistrate had left his house and come down to the flat; he wasn't very sure about that matter; Papuan goldfields had always been

conspicuously peaceful, but then, no field had ever shown so much gold in so small a space as Tatatata, and, on a field, the more gold, the more trouble. . . .

For the last two hours, a party of natives had been visible, making their way down the sides of the basin. They seemed—for natives—to be in a tremendous hurry; but no one troubled much about that, since nobody had come to Tatatata to study the habits of Papuans. If anyone thought about it at all, he put down the haste to the pig that the men were carrying, wrapped in leaves and slung from a pole—a good pig, by its size, probably one of the tuskers that the Papuan holds “something better than his wife, a little dearer than his child”. When there is a feast in prospect, and especially a feast with tusker pig in it, the Papuan, usually slow, can call on reserves of speed that astonish and exhaust the very best of active white men. . . .

“What’s the time?” somewhat impatiently asked Caxon of the nearest old salt.

Looking at a huge silver watch, the sailor replied: “Ten past eleven.”

“Aren’t you slow?”

“Me slow? My watch slow? That watch hasn’t lost, not two seconds, in ten years.”

“Then why can’t we use it, and hang this sextant business?”

“Because,” said a tall, fair man with a prettyish face—Spicer—“we want to be absolutely legal, and if two master mariners make it twelve o’clock, on the day that’s the thirtieth after Smithson went away—at twelve o’clock—nobody can say a word about any of our claims afterwards.”

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"It's a blanky long time to wait."

"There's Bob Whitson; he'll shorten it for you, if you lend him a boy."

Whitson, the storekeeper—storekeeper on many a Papuan goldfield of old times; growing no younger, but keen as ever on adding to his gains—sent the boy down to the store; saw him back, laden with beer that was priced like liqueur brandy, and distributed the bottles, making memoranda in his notebook the while. They drank, wiped hands, sleeves, handkerchiefs across their mouths; took out pipes and cigarettes, and smoked. They talked, nervously and jerkily, as the minutes, the quarter hours ran by. Some of them watched the team of Papuans, now close at hand.

"There's a fellow has been a policeman," proffered one. "I know the cut of them, in or out of serge, for all that he's got nothing on but a breech-clout."

"I see him," agreed Whitson. "I shouldn't think he had been long out of uniform either. They go back to the pack very quick."

There was another silence.

"What's the time now? Not twelve o'clock yet?"

"Four minutes more," said the oldest of the master mariners. "Those beggars are going to have their feast here. They're putting down their pig."

"My God, men," cried a new, young miner, suddenly, "that's no pig; it's a corpse!"

The Papuans had paused, and set down their load. The man whom Whitson recognised as an ex-policeman, was unwrapping the leaves. Out of the upper end of the bundle, a hand showed long and pale.

What the Magistrate-Warden said, on the spur of that moment, is better left unreported. No Magistrate-Warden likes to see corpses, especially corpses that are wrapped in leaves and carried by Papuan head-hunters, littering up his immaculate District; and thus far, Tatatata had really been immaculate, a model to all districts and all friends. The vexed official was plunging downward, with the intention of arresting the whole party and confiscating the corpse, when something happened that checked him as if he had been pulled up by a rope.

The bundle got up, shed the wrappings of leaves, and stood confessed as a living white man; a slight, young man in khaki and puttees, with a felt hat crammed down upon his neat dark head. He staggered for a moment as if giddy, and then, steadying himself by holding on to the shoulder of the native who had been recognised as a policeman, he called out; "What's the time?"

"Two minutes to twelve," mechanically answered one of the master mariners, raising his sextant to his eye.

The youth was standing right on the edge of Caxon's claim. Before anyone could stop him, he had seized a pick that was lying there, rushed across the claim, and landed in the midst of the precious treasure-hole beyond. With all his strength, which did not seem to be great, he drove the pick into the ground; lifted it, and drove it again, two or three times. Then he raised his head, and still holding the pick, cried out ringingly: "I declare this claim re-occupied, and work done on it, within the legal time, by Philip Amory's legal representative."

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"Jumping Jiminy," shouted the old master mariner, "It's a girl, a crimson girl!"

"It's Mrs. Philip Amory," said Pia, "and I'll thank you all to clear off from my husband's claim."

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The story has been told, many times, since, on steamer decks, in bars of tropic hotels, through the long evenings of goldfields other than Tatatata. Everyone knows how Pia, and the wise old Papuan sergeant, distrusting Spicer, planned to make a secret arrival so that no "accident" should delay the saving of the claim. How they travelled the greater part of the night; how Pia, tired out but determined to go on, decided to be carried for the last stage of the trip, slung to a pole, as sick white people often are; how between them, she and Simoi arranged that she should be tied up in leaves, to look like a pig, while the carriers and Simoi shed all vestiges of civilisation, and appeared as wild natives of the bush. . . .

Not for many a year will the story be forgotten, of how the "Jeweller's Shop" of Tatatata was saved.

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After a storm comes a calm. Quiet weeks followed, during which Pia, with the help, direct and indirect, of about half the miners on the field, worked her claim.

If there was envy, now and then, over the results of her "clean-up", if the man who measured the results of his week's work by ounces, and too few of them, swore he would give it up and go back to Sydney,

when he saw that Pia's bi-weekly gathering was counted by pounds troy—it made her popularity no less. The whole of Tatatata field frankly adored her. Two exceptions there had been, Spicer and Caxon. Against them, the public opinion of the field massed itself so strongly that they thought best to sell their claims and go. Caxon was later heard of in Siberian goldfields; Spicer is acting as high-class “barker” for an emigration agency. Occasionally he gives lectures on his wonderful journeyings through the island continent of Papua; the unknown races discovered by him; the goldfield that he gave to an ungrateful and unrewarding Empire. . . .

I take up my tale once more.

There came a day to Koki Gaol and to me, when the world seemed more than ever unbearable. Head Gaoler Holly had been down on me again, for neglecting to have my cell in order by the proper hour, for trying to smuggle letters, for answering back when reproved, and threatening to punch his head, because he pulled down a length of rubble stone wall over which I had spent half a day, and told me to do it again. I was out at elbows with him, with the coloured prisoners, with the weather, which was unbearably hot and steamy, and with the world and life in general. There was no special cause, beyond the recurring fits of wild impatience which I had learned to recognise as inevitable by now. News from the goldfield was good; Pia was well, and hoped to come down for a few weeks' holiday soon.

News from elsewhere was unimportant; the whole country seemed taken up by anticipation of the forthcoming visit of the Prince of Ulster, who was to spend

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one passing day in Port Moresby, before he ended his last tour of the British Empire, and went home to be married. The announcement of the future wedding had been received with loyal excitement; the town was doubly decorated; anyone who had ever seen the Prince or the Princess was a hero. Pia might have claimed more distinction in that line than any other, had she chosen, for she had danced with him, some few years ago; she had, indeed, been one of his favourite partners. He had asked the authorities if she was to be in town; and had even expressed disappointment when he heard the lovely little Australian could not be present. Whether he knew the reason, whether the strange, terrible, romantic history of our sad marriage had been told to him, no one in Port Moresby could say. It was probable, however; one does not cross the wishes of a Prince, without explanation or apology, or both. . . .

With Pia well, with the goldfield claim safe, with the country a-tiptoe over the Prince of Ulster's visit, I had no special cause for sadness, for kicking, as I did kick, in spite of my better self, against the pricks of prison life. Yet I was wretched; I looked forward, four more years ahead—since it was too certain that "good conduct" allowances would never reduce my sentence—and felt, not for the first time, that life was unbearable.

The mood, I knew, would pass. I was ashamed of it; ashamed that I could not pay the price I had set out to pay, without complaint. But I could, and did, save my self-respect by telling myself that it was not always so. That to-morrow I might be more resigned. That next month, next year, I should have almost surely settled into my life at last; taken up the jog-

trot, stupid pace all prisoners should learn; set out to cover the long, long road to love and freedom, with at least a fair imitation of patience. . . .

In the evening, just before locking up, Holly came to me, and looked at me, I thought, a bit oddly. I thought he was going to speak, and wondered vaguely what I had been up to now. But he said nothing; he only stared, opened his mouth, closed it again, and went.

Koki Gaol stands on a hill; the public road is below it, not very far away. After I had gone to my cell that night, I was pursued by odd fancies about the road. That was nothing new; it obsessed me at times, as I daresay visible roads obsess prisoners, the wide world over; trouble them; call to them. . . .

This time, however, it was my ears, not my eyes, that were in question. From the wired-in verandah, I could only see dark sky, white stars, the sea below the gaol. But from the other side, the road side, sounds kept coming—or I thought they did. Strange sounds, like cheering. Windy cheering, borne on the night breezes, and swept away again. Cheering that paused at times to centre itself into a name, repeat the name, then follow up with “Hip, hip, hip, hooray!”

“They are cheering somebody,” I decided at last. “What the devil do they want to come and do it down at the gaol gate for? ‘Hooray!’—that’s what they’re saying. Not ‘Amory.’ It couldn’t be—By God, though, it is!”

For the last cry had been, unmistakably: “Black Sheep! Black Sheep! Hooray!” One might conceivably mistake the not very shoutable name of

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"Amory," but the sharp syllables of the other admitted no misunderstanding.

I had not gone to bed. I stood pressed to the chickenwire enclosure, staring, listening, my heart throbbing as it had not throbbed for many a weary month. Something had happened; of that I was now sure. Those men down on the road—friends, for a ducat—were trying to tell me about it.

From the open world a wind of freedom seemed suddenly to blow over me, mounting to my head like wine. What news can there be for a prisoner—what good news—save one thing only?

I battered with my hands and feet on the walls. I shouted till Head Gaoler Holly deserted his supper, and came along in no very friendly mood. I demanded to know what had happened.

He did not reprove me as he might have done the day before. He only told me that I was the most troublesome prisoner that had ever set foot in the blanky gaol, and that I'd hear anything there was to hear in the morning; if he got his orders then. He also said I'd better hold my tongue, and give no more lip. But his tone was half hearted. So then I knew.

When he had gone, I flung myself on my bed, and found myself crying tears of joy.

They told me all about it next day. The Prince of Ulster—God bless him—had asked for prisoners to be released on the double occasion of his visit, and his coming marriage; and had, for Port Moresby, selected me.

There was a day or two to pass before certain formalities were observed. The time went silver-

footed. Head Gaoler Holly slacked his severities, became almost at once, comradely.

"You're a damn bad prisoner, Amory," he observed, over a friendly cigar—"but it's mostly the worst ones are the best. I wish you good luck; you and the little lady, and I hope you'll hold no grudge against me for doing my duty."

"No," I said. "No," but I was not thinking of him. For the launch was engaged, and the cargo loaded, and I was to be off to Tatatata, and freedom, and love, at dawn.

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News travels slowly in Papua; I took my own with me.

I travelled down to Tatatata, from the top of the basin, by night. It was in my mind that I would reach her by dawn; that in the first pure golden hours of day, our meeting should take place.

The sun was not yet up, when I came out of the forest on to the flat, and saw, close before me, the house that I knew, from her letters, to be hers. I paused a moment to look back at the high, fair peaks of the Pia Laurier Range, just blushing into rose before the earliest kiss of dawn; and then I opened the door of the little house, and quietly went in.

She was asleep. It was a moment, and no longer, before she woke; but she woke in my arms.

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We have our plans, for the use of the money. There will be roads, bridges, buildings, in Papua, such as the next half century would never have given her, but for

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Pia and for me. There will be great hospitals for the study of tropical disease. There will be immense plantations of all kinds of food, so that no one, white or black, shall ever want the necessities of life. What else may follow, we do not know yet. Life is before us, and the world is wide.

THE END



